

The Superintendent and the Curriculum Director: A Grounded Theory to Support the
Development of a Collaborative Relationship

by

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memories of my mother, Susan M. Bell, my grandmother Ophelia Bryant Bell, and my great grandfather, Johnnie B. Bryant. They always had the highest of expectations for me and accepted nothing less than my best.

It is also dedicated to several of the stellar educational leaders that I have had the honor of working with over my career. They saw leadership in me when I didn't see it in myself: Maria Weaver (deceased), Deborah Manciel, Clara Brooks and Dr. Rheta Rubenstein.

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Abstract

The superintendent and the curriculum director are two of the most important positions in a school district. This study analyzes the relationship between these two significant school district leaders and identifies indicators of collaboration. Three school districts and six participants were studied—three superintendents and three curriculum directors. Each participant completed a pre-survey, a pre-interview, and a follow up interview after I attended an educational event. Artifacts such as meeting agendas and slide show presentations were analyzed as well. The data collected was analyzed through the lens of strategic leadership theory and transformational leadership theory, as well as literature that explores the superintendent, curriculum, and instruction; the assistant superintendent; central office/middle management; effective leadership models; trust and efficacy; and reform/organizational development. Through this qualitative study, a grounded theory was developed. I determined that being cognizant and confident of one's role as either superintendent or curriculum director, particularly regarding the vision of the organization and having a common understanding of working together to achieve a common goal, are indicators of successful collaboration. Such collaboration results in motivated, engaged, and productive members in the organization. For this level of collaboration to occur, it is essential that a superintendent possess agency and the ability to influence as she shares her vision. The curriculum director must have the same qualities, along with the desire and capacity to support the vision. Together they are a compelling model for other leaders on how to develop motivated, engaged, and productive followers.

Key Words: superintendent, curriculum director, collaboration, leadership, vision, followers, grounded theory, vision caster, vision carrier

Chapter: 1 Introduction

School districts' central office leaders--inclusive of superintendents and curriculum directors--are expected to design systems that lead toward instructional improvement, educational accountability, and implementation of standards with increased rigor (Rigby et al. 2018). Additionally, these leaders are responsible for direction setting, professional learning, and personnel structures (Carter & Greer, 2013; Jiangang et al., 2020). Honig et al. (2017) stated that educational reforms aim to fundamentally shift central offices to operate as support systems for improvements in teaching and learning. Lastly, Killion and Harrison (2016) presented several capacities of central office leaders, such as curriculum directors and superintendents: program manager—overseeing the operational aspects of the organization, coaching champion—implementing effective learning systems, facilitator—leading strategic planning, and change agent—promoting and guiding continuous improvement. Killion and Harrison (2016) asserted that these roles may be enacted concurrently or one at a time, however each is crucial to educator and student success. Defining the terms superintendent and curriculum director is important to ensure clarity in identifying and differentiating between these two crucial positions.

Superintendent

According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), a superintendent is one who has executive oversight and charge. The Latin root is super, meaning over and combined with intendere, meaning to direct or oversee. For purposes of this study, the superintendent has executive oversight, charge, and is responsible for the direction of an entire school district. Murphy and Hallinger (1986) stated that the superintendent provides the district consistency and coordination

in technical core operations, internal processes and outcomes and direction in curriculum and instruction. Arar and Avidov-Ungar (2020) described the superintendent as providing guidance, consultation, and support to district leaders. This consultation and support are guided by the superintendent's mission, vision, goals, and values (Arar & Avidov-Ungar, 2020; Beard, 2018).

Curriculum Director

Curriculum and instruction includes the alignment of standards to curricular resources and overseeing the implementation of research-based instructional strategies (Dimuzio, 2011). Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines curriculum as the courses offered by an educational institution. A director is defined as one who supervises, gives overall direction, or is recognized as the head. Thus, the curriculum director supervises, gives direction to, and is recognized as the head of all things having to do with instruction. Supervision of teaching and learning in all subjects, K-12 demands the specific guidance of a curriculum director. This curriculum director position is often given the title of Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction or Director of Teaching and Learning. In some very large districts, this person is the Chief Academic Officer. For purposes of this study, I will simply use the term curriculum director--the person in charge of instruction. Although the two roles of curriculum director and superintendent are paramount to a school district's success and overall student learning, more research is needed to understand the relationship between these two leaders.

Problem Statement

Abundant research exists on the superintendency of school districts regarding the various roles, skills, and descriptions of that position (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Clore, 1991; Muller, 2015; Petersen, 1998). Superintendents should possess and articulate an instructional vision (Clore, 1991; Petersen, 1999). Bjork and Kowalski (2005) concurred, identifying the superintendent as the teacher of teachers or the instructional leader. Danna and Spratt (2013) focused on administration, arguing that a superintendent should establish clear vision and goals for the organization. Conley and Cooper (2010) described the superintendent as more of a political actor, providing organizational coordination. Other descriptors include moral steward, community builder, and agent of cultural change (Murphy, 2002; Sheppard, 2009).

Conversely, there is a dearth of research on the curriculum director position. Kaltenecker (2011) identified some of the responsibilities of a curriculum director as (a) building the capacity of others; (b) coordinating initiatives; and (c) building and maintaining relationships with building leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders. Dimuzio, (2011) commented on the paucity of literature discussing the curriculum director. Kaltenecker (2011) described the role of assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction (or curriculum director) as being ignored and misunderstood. This lack of understanding is causing curriculum directors to create their own job descriptions and operate in the position as they see fit.

The superintendent and the curriculum director are the two of the most influential positions in a local education agency or school district, as they create structures and policies that allow principals and teachers to support children in the classroom. Andero (1996) declared that the superintendent is the “most influential player in the business of forming curriculum policy” (p. 276), and that the superintendent’s goal is to be a positive influence of curricular policy. It is

my assertion that this influence should be supported by the superintendent's collaboration with the person selected to oversee curriculum--the curriculum director. Emerging leaders in school district administration have no success indicators for the superintendent and curriculum director relationship--what it looks like, sounds like, or how it should be cultivated. To fill the gap in the literature, this study explored the following research question: What are the actions, beliefs, attitudes, qualities, social structures, and processes of a collaborative relationship between the superintendent and curriculum director?

The relationship between the superintendent and curriculum director must be studied. Although the superintendent and curriculum director each impact teaching and learning for students, the curriculum director is directly responsible for oversight of curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, and school leadership. The superintendent must attend to instruction, as well as be the face of the district for the community, and oversee all operational matters (Whritner, 2009). From the perspective of one area assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, superintendents should have curriculum directors that they trust to ensure that teaching and learning are happening at a high level of effectiveness (D. Rocheleau, personal communication, April 9, 2018). Sutherland (2017) defined trust as the ability to be vulnerable, encompassing the facets of benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence. Distrust undermines cooperation and efficiency and results in anxiety and insecurity, causing individuals to monitor others' motives. Hickman (2016) asserted that organizations improve when leaders are collaborative and trust the combined wisdom of their administrative team. Trust and collaboration assist with the establishing of organizational mission, vision, and values. These actions embody transformational and strategic leadership, the theoretical constructs used to frame this study.

Theoretical Constructs

When determining the theoretical constructs for this research, two theories continue to resonate--strategic leadership and transformational leadership. Strategic leadership was identified as a theoretical construct for this study because it connects with the concepts of collaboration, common goals, and a culture of trust. Strategic leadership is “the ability to anticipate events, envision possibilities, maintain flexibility, and empower others to create strategic change as necessary” (Hoskisson et al., 2013, p. 495). Strategic leadership processes are intentionally collaborative with the leader and her dominant coalition (Carter & Greer, 2013). The strategic leadership perspective is global, concerning the entire organization (Selznick, 1984). Strategic leadership effects include the team making strategic decisions, creating and communicating a vision of the future, and developing key competencies and capabilities (Hickman, 1998). According to Boal and Hooijberg (2000) the essence of strategic leadership involves the capacity to learn, change, and implement managerial wisdom; such capacity is also evident in transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership inspires and stimulates followers to develop leadership capacity and achieve extraordinary outcomes (Bass & Riggio, 2006). When discussing the processes of transformational leadership, it is important to note the transactional relationships between leaders and followers often occur in small group situations within the organization. Followers are influenced by leaders to achieve organizational goals (Cote, 2017). According to Pettigrew (1992), the effects of transformational leadership include changes in cognitive and causal maps. These maps show the logic behind drawing conclusions and making decisions to act. The resulting action is followers rising to the challenge to go beyond their immediate self-interest and prioritizing the organization (Chaib-draa, 2002; Pettigrew, 1992). Transformational

leaders “create a connection with followers, attend to their individual needs, and help followers reach their potential” (Keskes et al., 2018, p. 272).

Strategic leadership and transformational leadership theories describe leaders who are collaborative and guide their followers to accomplish goals and exceed expectations. An overlapping concept between these two leadership theories is the importance of communicating vision, mission, and values (Carter & Greer, 2013; Cote, 2017). This is key in developing follower capacities, as well as stimulating innovation and creativity. Strategic and transformational leaders affect change by modeling expected behaviors. Lastly, strategic and transformational leaders duplicate themselves in order to create leaders.

Significance of the Study

Creating and communicating vision and influencing followers for the betterment of the organization are actions, social structures, and processes of a collaborative relationship that must be inherent in the relationship between the superintendent and the curriculum director. If superintendents and curriculum directors are to collaboratively manage a school district, they need to continue to develop the following competencies, which include the ability to: communicate vision, increase follower capacity, and develop leaders. These collaborative structures will enable school district administrators to more readily create systems that support effective organizations and lead to instructional improvement (Rigby et al., 2018).

Study Design

This qualitative study was designed to develop a grounded theory regarding the relationship between the superintendent and the curriculum director. Explaining qualitative methods, Miles et al. (2014) stated that, while investigating phenomena, the researcher's role is to gain a holistic and systemic overview of the environment, inclusive of social arrangements and explicit and implicit rules. Carspecken (1996) went a step further and stated that methodological theories and their selection provide the principles which govern research design, assist with the development of field techniques, and support the interpretation of data. Grounded theory gives researchers the opportunity to view the world and interpret the data from the perspective of the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

In grounded theory, coding is what transports researchers and their data from transcript to theory. Saldana (2016) supported this assertion by explaining that qualitative codes are essence capturing and that when they are clustered together in similarity and pattern, categories are created. Categories facilitate generation of themes and build a foundation for theory development. I developed a grounded theory from the themes that were generated per the data.

My data collection and interpretation included having six participants complete a pre-survey, participate in a pre-interview, allow me to attend one educational event, and participate in a follow up interview after the event. The sampling of the selected districts was homogeneous and purposeful, per the demographic and social characteristics of each district. All of the districts have African American superintendents. Additionally, each district has a majority of African American students. As the researcher collecting and analyzing the data through various field techniques, I was “essentially the main instrument in the study” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 9),

remaining aware of my current professional experiences which have supplied me with biases (Gehman et al., 2018), which are some of the limitations of the study design.

Limitations. When developing the proposal for this study, I planned to immerse myself in the physical environment (Miles et al., 2014) documenting the superintendents' and curriculum directors' lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990). COVID 19 prevented said immersion. Safety precautions—most meetings were virtual, and no one from out of district was allowed in offices—did not allow it to be so. As the pandemic is managed and future studies are conducted, I look forward to being able to shadow leaders and physically inhabit their spaces for extended periods of time. The size of the sample and time availability were also limitations. A longitudinal study over several years, as well as covering a broader geographical area would add more data to support the grounded theory.

Conclusion

Whereas we can define and describe the roles of the superintendent and the curriculum director, there is still a limited understanding and a scarcity of literature regarding how these two leaders interact. More research is needed on how these leaders collaborate and manage school districts with the goals of optimal teaching, learning and leading. To understand the gap in the literature that discusses the relationship between the superintendent and curriculum director, chapter two defines the theoretical constructs—strategic leadership and transformational leadership—and explicates literature that explores the superintendent, curriculum, and instruction; the assistant superintendent; central office and middle management; effective leadership models; trust and efficacy; and reform/organizational development. Chapter three expounds upon the qualitative and particularly the grounded theory research methods used to facilitate the exploration and identification of indicators of a collaborative relationship between

the superintendent and the curriculum director. It also discusses how the sites and participants were selected, and how the data collection was conducted. Chapter Four elucidates the data analysis and findings used to develop the grounded theory. It describes the coding methods and details the categories and themes that arose as the data were analyzed. The themes include the following: role identification as it relates to vision, collaboration, and motivated and engaged followers. Lastly, Chapter Four reveals the grounded theory that emerged from these themes. Chapter Five validates the grounded theory by showing the connection to the data, the theoretical constructs, and the literature. The data, the literature, and the grounded theory highlight the essential qualities of a collaborative relationship between these two impactful leaders in a district's central administration: the superintendent and the curriculum director

Chapter 2: The Literature Review

To answer the research question--what are the actions, beliefs, attitudes, qualities, social structures, and processes of a collaborative relationship between the superintendent and curriculum director--this literature explores research that expounds on the actions, beliefs, attitudes, social structures, qualities, and processes occurring in a cohesive and collaborative relationship between the superintendent and the curriculum director. Categories of the literature include the superintendent, curriculum, and instruction; the assistant superintendent; central office and middle management; two theoretical constructs—strategic and transformational leadership; effective leadership models; trust and efficacy; and reform/organizational development. The research question itself centers around leadership, relationship and collaboration. Researchers argue that self- and collective-efficacy, as well as trust are essential to collaboration (Daly & Finnigan, 2011; Holtzman, 2012). I believe that these are attitudes, beliefs, and qualities necessary for cohesion and collaboration between the superintendent and the curriculum director.

The Superintendent, Curriculum and Instruction

The literature concerning the superintendency often focuses on novice superintendents and their experiences, or the turnover of those who are further along in their careers. It discusses the various pathways to the position, including age, experience, race and sex (Davis & Bowers, 2019). That focus notwithstanding, the research is largely centered around indicators or characteristics of effective superintendents. Arar and Avidov-Ungar (2020) described the

superintendent as providing guidance, consultation and support to district leaders. The superintendent's role is described as a mission, guided by their vision, goals and values (Arar & Avidov-Ungar, 2020; Beard, 2018). According to (Bredeson, 1995; Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Muller, 2015) superintendents should place a high value on collaboration, communication and strategic leadership.

In addition, Clore (1991) and Petersen (1999) defined superintendents as being required to possess and articulate an instructional vision. In agreement, Bjork and Kowalski (2005) identified the superintendent as the teacher of teachers or the instructional leader. Danna and Spratt (2013) supported this by arguing that a superintendent should establish clear vision and goals, particularly around curriculum. Superintendents must ensure that the curriculum is aligned to the adopted state standards. This alignment is supported by quality professional learning for instructional and administrative staff. Danna and Spratt (2013) found that superintendent support of training in effective instructional leadership behaviors increased the actual development of effective instructional leadership behaviors in principals and the instructional capacity of teachers. Leadership drives reform (Danna & Spratt, 2013).

Waters and Marzano (2007) found more evidence of leadership driving reform, when they contrasted and compared the leaders of two school districts. The Waters and Marzano (2007) study, found that the leader who had the greater impact on academics, as measured by test scores, believed in systemic, sustainable change marked by collaborative goal-setting, school and district improvement. Andero (1996) broadened this perspective and declared that the superintendent is the "most influential player in the business of forming curriculum policy" (p. 276). Furthermore, the superintendent's goal is to be a positive influence of said policy with regards to legislation, politics, and special interest groups (Andero, 1996).

Andero (1996) proposed that a collaboration between the superintendent, school board and principals regarding curriculum is beneficial for student achievement. King (2002) provided an example of this type of collaboration: a district instructional leadership team—the chief operating officer, the deputy director of teaching and learning, three deputy superintendents, the chief financial officer, the equity officer, the director of human resources, and nine principals—served as cluster leaders in the district. In the research, the team met twice a month, discussing the teaching and learning work of the schools all centered within an essential question connected to goals. Principals led learning visits and collaborated with critical friends—colleagues who offer feedback and support (Bambino, 2002). Topics included being lead learners, focusing on teaching and learning, developing leadership capacity, providing conditions for Professional Learning Communities—where educators collaborate around data regarding student learning (DuFour, 2004), implementing data-driven decisions, and using resources creatively. Further examples of collaboration were detailed by Wright and Harris' (2010) study of how becoming more culturally proficient closed the achievement gap in a qualitative study of eight school districts; the superintendent led these efforts. In order to support academic success, the superintendent must hold the belief that diversity—having more than one race, color, religion, socio-economic status, gender identification or sexual orientation represented—and equity are necessary, and must be considered when providing instruction and interventions based upon students' individual needs (Cramer et al., 2018). Then it is suggested that superintendents partner with the board members to ensure that this vision is shared with the district and the community.

While many researchers place a huge emphasis on the superintendent's interaction with academics (Andero, 1996, King, 2002, Wright & Harris, 2010), Whritner (2009) spoke of academics being shifted to the assistant superintendent. Similarly, Conley and Cooper (2010)

described the superintendent as more of a political actor, providing instructional vision and organizational coordination. Murphy (2002) stated that the superintendent's role in educational leadership has been recast as that of moral steward, community builder, and leader of school improvement. And, they must provide the district with consistency and coordination in technical core operations, monitor internal processes, and inspect outcomes (Murphy & Hallinger, 1986).

This redefining of the role does not, however, negate the superintendent's involvement with instruction. The primary responsibility of a school district is to ensure high-quality teaching and learning for all students, which is the superintendent's responsibility as the Chief Executive Officer. Murphy and Hallinger (1986) supported this assertion by affirming that the superintendent should provide the district direction in curriculum and instruction, and should coordinate and control instructional management activities. The superintendent provides this direction with the support of her guiding coalition (Carter & Greer, 2013). This coalition consists of central office administrators, inclusive of the assistant superintendent.

The Assistant Superintendent

Muller (2015) discovered how central office administrators facilitate district-wide improvement initiatives, learning that there was a high value placed on collaboration, communication, and strategic leadership. Central office administrators believed that these skills, along with consistency in communicating messages and an equitable distribution of resources should be present. He also stated that central office administrators must be adaptable and adept at problem-solving, which is especially true of assistant superintendents.

And, while educational leaders may have to assume many leadership functions simultaneously, the primary role is always to support and monitor teaching and learning. Conley and Cooper (2010) stated that "strong school district leadership positively affects student

achievement” (p. 123). They further asserted that the success and longevity of the superintendent is contingent upon the support of the assistant superintendent (Conley & Cooper, 2010).

Whritner (2009) saw the role of superintendent as shifting away from instruction by using terms such as “chief political officer” (p. 1), and asserted that academics have been shifted to the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, while the superintendent focuses on relations with the school board and community.

Dimuzio (2011) described the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction as a leader who disseminates new state standards to the teachers and building administrators, aligns standards to curricular resources, and oversees implementation of the research-based instructional strategies. Assistant superintendents are responsible for all things teaching and learning, including whole system reforms intended to increase student achievement. Dimuzio (2011) argued that more professional development for this role would be beneficial, as it would increase performance and job satisfaction. Lastly, Dimuzio (2011) asserted that there is a dearth of research on these administrators.

Kaltenecker (2011) asserted that the role of the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction is ignored and misunderstood. This is despite the fact that the assistant superintendent for curriculum is charged with implementing the local policy, state regulations, and federal legislation from the superintendent. Federal accountability measures and new curricular standards from the state are left for the assistant superintendent to determine how to train principals and teachers, and then monitor implementation. Kaltenecker (2011) reviewed a dissertation database and only found ten studies which solely identified the assistant superintendent as the unit of analysis. Additionally, Kaltenecker (2011) found that assistant superintendents mostly constructed their own visions of their roles, and these are often shaped by

the context of the organizational culture. Five key functions of assistant superintendents include: (a) creating and communicating a vision; (b) building the capacity of others; (c) promoting collaboration; (d) coordinating initiatives; and (e) building and maintaining relationships with building leaders, teachers, other central office colleagues, and community partners. The ensuing literature discusses central office administrators in general, including more detail regarding the specific functions of the assistant superintendent mentioned by Kaltenecker (2011).

Central Office/Middle Management

District leaders are responsible for direction setting, curriculum, professional learning, personnel, structures and systems (Carter & Greer, 2013; Jiangang, et al., 2020). Gamble (2013) concurred that central office administrators, such as curriculum directors and superintendents, are to manage and direct district operations, and to support these operations at the building level. They found the lack of direct involvement with school leaders at some of their participant sites concerning. Going further, the researchers asserted that central office administrators must create positive and supportive environments for quality instruction; and that, for the highest quality instruction and student achievement to occur daily in classrooms, there must be collective leadership between buildings and central office, creating conditions that enhance learning (Gamble, 2013).

On a similar note, Honig et al. (2017) asserted that many school districts have shifted away from district improvement efforts that focus solely on schools. These reforms aim to fundamentally shift central offices to operate as support systems for improvements in teaching and learning--utilizing research to inform decisions about textbook adoptions and curriculum frameworks. The school districts cited by Honig et al. (2017) committed to research about their own systems and practices. These districts analyzed sociocultural learning theory as a construct.

They unpacked the concepts of low stasis--practice inconsistent with the research with no change and high stasis--practice consistent with the research but no change. The districts also considered low growth--movement toward deeper use of research but to still low levels; and high growth--movement from practice inconsistent with the research to consistent practice. Each of these constructs were examined in order to shift their daily work (Honig et al., 2017).

Central offices should operate as learning organizations, socially constructing meanings and processes, subscribing to organizational learning theory, and learning from trial and error. And, central office administrators should be considered lead-learners (Fullan, 2010; Honig, 2008). Killion and Harrison (2016) presented five core roles that fall within the portfolio of central office professional learning leaders, such as curriculum directors and superintendents: learning system designer, program manager, coaching champion, facilitator, and change agent. The roles overlap and interconnect. The reduced number of roles reflects the shift from a central office-driven, one-size-fits-all, top-down approach.

In examining executive directors' perceptions regarding their roles in district leadership, it was cautioned that literature speaks heavily of the lack of understanding of roles in educational administration, leading to overstepping boundaries and creating obstacles to improvement (Gamble, 2013; Bridges, et al., 2019). The overlapping and interconnection of roles discussed by Killion and Harrison (2016) supports a school and team-based, collaborative, personalized, approach to professional learning. This professional learning is aligned with educator performance and student outcome standards. The shift from a directive to a collaborative approach does not diminish the significance of central office leadership for professional learning, but shifts to deeper, more focused and integrated learning for all involved (Killion & Harrison, 2016).

Rothman (2009) also discussed the importance of collaboration between all leadership--central office and building level—in order to improve student achievement. Strategies of focus were constant and consistent classroom visits, training for teachers on collaboration and support from an external provider. The external provider helped to keep an eye on improvement, when administration would get bogged down with day-to-day concerns. Likewise, Bjork (1993) asserted that improving education requires district level leadership training, and promoted individualized preparation programs to develop these skills, such as staff selection, principal supervision, and clear goals to support improvements in teaching and learning. Bjork (1993) also stressed uniting the staff, students, parents and community around a common vision and supporting the board in setting policy.

Conducting a study of instructional leadership, Marzano and Waters (2009) asked several questions: What is the strength of relationship between district-level administrative actions and average student achievement? What are the specific district leadership behaviors that are associated with student achievement? Their findings suggested that when district leaders are carrying out their leadership responsibilities effectively, student achievement across the district is positively affected. They also asserted that non-negotiables for achievement, developed collaboratively between central office and principals, create the conditions for what they called defined autonomy. Other effective strategies included: establishing non-negotiable goals for instruction, creating board alignment with and support of district goals, monitoring achievement of instructional goals, and allocating resources to support the goals for instruction.

It is my assertion that if the superintendent has the vision for instruction as Clore (1991) and Petersen (1999) argue, but the curriculum director has been charged with carrying out that vision (Whritner, 2009), then it stands to reason that cohesion and collaboration are necessary to

truly manifest that vision. Leaders and followers working together to manifest the vision of the organization is a central theme of my theoretical constructs, strategic leadership and transformational leadership.

Theoretical Constructs

Strategic Leadership

One theoretical construct that connects with the aforementioned concepts of collaboration, and common goals is strategic leadership. Strategic leadership consists of the CEO and their top team, or dominant coalition. This team establishes mission, vision and values to focus activities (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000; Hickman, 2016). The path-goal theory is an example of strategic leadership (Cote, 2017; Northouse, 2016). It emphasizes the relationship between the leader's style, the characteristics of the followers and the organizational setting. It is imperative that the leader uses a style that best meets followers' motivational needs. This is done by choosing behaviors that complement or supplement what is missing in the work setting. The CEO, along with her dominant coalition, must create a clear vision and influence her followers by communicating that vision. This clear communication will support persistence and consistency in followers to achieve desired organizational outcomes (Cote, 2017).

Leaders try to enhance followers' goal attainment by providing information or rewards in the work environment (Indvik & Fitzpatrick, 1986). This is an example of expectancy theory in that followers will be motivated if they think they are capable of performing their work, if they believe their efforts will result in a certain outcome, and if they believe that the payoffs for doing their work are worthwhile--also known as self-efficacy. In support Carter and Greer (2013) stated that leadership style has a significant impact on organizational culture, citizen behaviors and job satisfaction.

According to Bonardi et al. (2018), strategic leaders use specific knowledge, experience, and values, to influence their assessment of the environment. Responsibilities of strategic leaders include leadership of self, leadership of others, and leadership of the organization. Additionally, strategic leaders are great multi-taskers, who manage entire organizations, while simultaneously managing change (Hoskisson et al., 2013). According to one area Assistant Superintendent, district leaders have to manage many facets of the district, but also find it imperative to collaborate with practitioners regarding problems of practice with teaching and learning (D. Rocheleau, personal communication, 2017).

Carter and Greer (2013), added that strategic leaders must meet an array of stakeholder expectations, and impact their organizations while meeting said expectations. Strategic leaders are expected to influence the “triple bottom line”—financial, social and environmental indicators (Carter & Greer, 2013, p. 377). Similarly, Sarfraz (2017) asserted that in order to sustain effective leadership, and to ensure their organization’s prosperity, leaders must constantly think, reflect and analyze all viewpoints and entities connected with the organization--company, shareholders, competitors and the environment. Additionally, there are six main leadership challenges that all leaders face: developing employees, instigating inspiration, developing managerial efficiency, guiding innovation, directing a team, and managing the politics and internal shareholders (Sarfraz, 2017).

Strategic leadership is global, entailing the entire organization, its goals as well as its capacities (Selznick, 1984). Strategic leaders must have three compelling qualities: absorptive capacity, adaptive capacity and managerial wisdom. Absorptive capacity is the ability to learn, and use that knowledge to adjust or modify systems and chaotic environments. Adaptive capacity is being able to change and be strategically flexible. This flexibility will affect current

performance and future opportunities. Managerial wisdom enables one to discern and perceive variations in the environment (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000). Strategic leaders must be able to anticipate trends, imagine various scenarios and have broad networks of support. They must also challenge assumptions (Sarfraz, 2017) and empower others to create strategic change when needed (Hickman, 2016). Lastly, strategic leaders sustain an effective organizational culture, infusing ethics into its systems (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000).

These cohesive and collaborative qualities should be exhibited by the superintendent and curriculum director. They represent the CEO and the dominant coalition, and should lead the other members of the team in establishing the mission, vision and instructional infrastructure.

Transformational Leadership

According to Keskes et al. (2018), there are five dimensions of transformational leadership:

1. A leadership style based on vision--the leader defines an idealized picture of the future based around organizational values.
2. A leadership style based on inspirational communication—the leader uses appeals and emotion to arouse followers’ emotions and motivation.
3. Leaders with a supportive leadership style express concern for followers and take into account their individual needs.
4. Leaders use intellectual stimulation to enhance followers’ abilities to think about problems in new ways.
5. Leaders implement a personal recognition style that explicitly values and praises followers’ efforts and achievements.

Transformational leaders are known to be strong role models. They embody high standards of morals and ethics (Cote, 2017). Transformational leaders have high expectations of their followers, motivating them to commit to the vision. The leaders are marked by their commitment to coaching and advising their followers. It is stated that trust is the “emotional glue” between these leaders and their followers (Cote, 2017, p. 34). Transformational leadership is where leaders influence followers to adopt certain behaviors in order to bring about beneficial change. “The central construct here is that of ‘vision’, and followers are enjoined to seek a ‘better’ future for the organization and to commit to seeking the goals arising from the vision” (Bush, 2018, p. 883).

Additionally, transformational leaders use intangible rewards such as personal development, recognition and self-esteem enhancement. This style of leadership is known to motivate employees and to enhance organizational performance (Bush, 2018). Transformational leaders develop special connections with followers, ensuring that their needs are met and that they reach their fullest potential. According to Carter and Greer (2013) the relationship between transformational leaders and their followers is described as a “bonding process” (Carter & Greer, 2013, p. 379). Followers and leaders are inextricably bound together in the transformation process (Northouse, 2016). The above are indicators of transformational leadership’s four primary factors: charisma, inspiration, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation (Keskes et al., 2018).

Transformational leaders increase the leadership capacity of their followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). One example of said leadership is teacher leaders that are expected to facilitate professional learning and participate in the decision-making process at the building and district level, coaching teachers and being positive representatives for the district. According to

Northouse (2016), “Transformational leadership involves an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them” (p. 61). Teachers impacted by this leadership style are having a greater impact on teaching and learning across the entire building by helping to enhance the practice of their colleagues.

Transformational leaders have a pivotal role in precipitating change, being proactive, and developing organizational capacity. They inspire a culture and followers that are proactive, empowered and innovative (Carter & Greer, 2013). These organizations adapt and absorb innovations into current structures, programs, and policies (Durand et al., 2016; Northouse, 2016). Transformational leaders are said to influence the internal mindset of followers. These leaders inspire, energize and intellectually stimulate (Cote, 2017).

Strategic leadership theory and transformational leadership theory each describe leaders who are collaborative and who guide their followers to accomplish goals and exceed expectations (Hickman, 2016; Northouse, 2016). Strategic and transformational leaders establish and communicate the vision of the organization, anticipate trends and support their followers with adapting to and absorbing those trends (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000; Carter & Greer, 2013). Developing these types of followers is a crucial skill and indicative of a collaborative and effective leader.

Effective Leadership Models

Research regarding effective leadership models broached topics around systems, collaboration, and learning leaders. Rigby et al. (2018) supported leaders expected to design systems that led toward instructional improvement--educational accountability and implementation of standards with increased rigor. These leaders addressed policy design that supports instructional goals. Also highlighted were bridging and buffering across organizational

levels and crafting coherence between goals, needs, and resources at the central office and school levels.

Szczesiul (2014) enhanced administrator collaboration by promoting the use of a protocol of structured dialogue and reflective practices. This structured dialogue and reflection develops internal pictures that can transfer into theories of action that are visible and can be evaluated. In further support of collaboration, Kotter and Cohen (2002) examined the need for and characteristics of effective teams. They warned against the danger of fragmentation at the top, asserting that one cannot lead change alone. Leaders must be emotionally honest and open and able to connect to others. The team must be composed of those with skill, capacity and credibility. And often, assembling a good team can mean pulling people in or pushing people out. Durand et al. (2016) asserted that leadership cannot and should not be restricted to or vested in one or two people because adaptive challenges demand facing changing realities and then changing priorities, attitudes, and behaviors.

Honig (2008) asserted that central offices should operate as learning organizations, and suggested the following theories as conceptual maps to attain this goal. In sociocultural learning theory, learning involves an individual's engagement with others and various artifacts or tools in particular activities. This learning takes place in social, historical, and cultural contexts. Learners socially construct the meaning of particular ideas and in the process develop and also potentially shape the habits of mind of their culture. Conversely, with organizational learning theory, learning comes from experience and/or trial-and-error. Learning often occurs under conditions of ambiguity. Additionally, per Honig (2008), other practices that encompass these conceptual frameworks include central office administrators' participation in central office administrator/principal partnerships. These partnerships involve being intentionally paired with

and providing support to building leaders. The ongoing use of evidence from these partnerships, such as meeting notes and perception surveys informs central office policies and practices to improve building leadership.

Gamble (2013) asserted that central office staff must collaborate with each other in order to adequately support building leaders, “For the highest quality instruction and student achievement to occur daily in classrooms, leaders are needed who depend on the collective leadership of others to help create conditions that support learning” (p. 41). Creating conditions that support learning requires providing instructional resources, professional learning, and monitoring instruction via walk-throughs (Hentschke et al., 2009). Effective collaborative leadership will facilitate these practices.

Hilliard and Newsome (2013) supported the lead learner concept and asserted that effective superintendents create leadership teams and promote an environment conducive to Professional Learning Communities (DuFour, 2004). According to Honig et al. (2017), effective superintendents involve central office staff in using research about their own systems and practices to guide how they themselves participate in school improvement. One model of a leader being a lead learner was Sheppard (2009). As a researcher returning to practice as a superintendent, Sheppard (2009) saw his role as that of the agent of cultural change. He agreed that organizational culture is informed by the nature of its leadership (Ott, 1989). Sheppard (2009) planned to accomplish this cultural change by altering organizational structures and facilitating collaborative leadership, organizational trust and learning. Sheppard understood that organizational culture--based upon organizational trust, is the most important factor determining performance in organizations because it dictates how people work together to complete a job (Llamas, 2013).

Efficacy and Trust

Thorough collaboration requires trust. Holtzman (2012) asserted that collective trust is involved in a reciprocal relationship with collective efficacy and academic emphasis. Holtzman (2012) suggested that a healthy organization must include collective trust, “a group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open” (p. 48). Members of the group engage in organizational citizenship behaviors which include: helpful behaviors, sportsmanship, organizational loyalty, organizational compliance, individual initiative, civic virtue, and self-development. Members must also focus on relationships in order to build trust among each constituent of the system, thereby becoming interdependent.

Goddard et al. (2004) approached collective efficacy, the capability of the entire system or organization, by delving more deeply into social cognitive theory. They stated that efficacy belief constructs are future oriented judgments about capabilities to organize and execute courses of action. Additionally, social capital theory suggests that it is the ties between individuals in a system that create the structure needed to modify formal systems and create reform. Looking more closely at the relationship between social capital and trust, Son and Feng (2019) explored whether or not individual and organizational social capital may be related to network trust and generalized trust. They determined that yes, there is a positive association between organizational social capital and generalized trust. The greater the amount of social capital, the greater likelihood of developing generalized trust. In similar work, Moolenaar et al. (2012) utilized social network analysis, encompassing social capital theory. They discovered that when social networks are strong, there is a strong sense of collective efficacy. Participants in the network have relationships that give them access to resources both professional and

emotional (Daly et al., 2016). Hence, social capital enhances the level of trust, which increases the level of collective efficacy.

Furthermore, Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) utilized Bandura's (1977, 1997) social cognitive theory to study motivation. Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) defined motivation as "processes that instigate and sustain goal-directed activities...[and] personal/internal influences that lead to outcomes such as choice, effort, persistence, achievement, and environmental regulation" (p. 1). Agency, believing that one has a large degree of influence over important events, is thought to lead to self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, the capability to learn and perform actions at designated levels, is thought to be a key to internal motivation. Possessing agency and self-efficacy facilitate the development of collective efficacy, which is supported by collective trust.

Superintendents and other district-level leaders in academically successful school districts evince a strong belief in the capacity of one another to achieve high standards of learning for all students, and high standards of teaching and leadership from all instructional and support personnel. Sutherland (2017) stated that trust is vital for individuals working together to create effective systems. Trust enhances social and interpersonal interactions, leading to desired behaviors such as altruism, civic virtue, and conscientiousness. Conversely, low trust behaviors undermine good communication and decision making and disrupt possible collaboration and effective problem solving. Problem solving is facilitated by collective efficacy, relational trust and a commitment to learning and growing together. This commitment to growth, along with the ability to problem solve supports organizational reform and development.

Reform/Organizational Development

In school districts, academic change is often considered a part of reform or organizational development. French and Bell (1999) conducted a study of organizational development--the applied behavioral science discipline dedicated to improving organizations and the people in them. This method uses a theory of planned change. People need strategies to cope, adapt, survive and prosper. There are processes for helping people to solve problems and take advantage of opportunities through change techniques called interventions. Arar and Avidov-Ungar (2020) argued that the superintendent's role is to mediate between policy reforms and those who must implement them, and to lead that implementation. Evans (1994) asserted that there is the organizational model that the organization subscribes to in theory, versus the model that the leader enacts. He asserted that both models are at work. The question is, which model is best for children?

Lytle (1992) answered this question by stating that school districts, in particular urban school districts need to be examined in their entirety, not just one school at a time. The organizational culture, its health, and the schisms therein need to be dissected and reconfigured. These constructs affect each school in the organization. And, there are often conflicting cultures in school administration, building leadership and teaching staff. Elmore (2003) agreed, citing loose coupling as the reason why schools and districts continue to engage in practices that research shows to be ineffective and manifestly not productive. He stated that many administrative structures exist to buffer instructional leadership and staff from improvements, perceived to be disruptions. Ineffective leaders are deliberately and calculatedly incompetent in managing instructional leadership and staff. With these leaders there is no mastered body of knowledge or expectations of competence. In an effort to improve culture, Lytle (1992)

supported reforms that included client-centered, authentic systems. Additionally, he believed that curricula should be based upon student interests, not convenience or traditions. Lytle (1992) cited a need to reconfigure curriculum based upon students' lived experiences and values. Students value respect, which must be given, as well as received. Relationship must be prioritized above instruction, in order for true instruction to take place. Lastly, that instruction needs to be culturally and communally appropriate (Lytle, 1992).

Continuing to address culture, Kotter and Cohen (2002) stated that real change happens when there is transformation--new technology, processes, strategic shifts, and cultural change. The researchers also asserted that changed behavior is a result of changed feelings. There are eight steps to making this happen: (a) create a sense of urgency, (b) develop a guiding team, (c) create a vision, (d) communicate the vision to all stakeholders, (e) empower others to support the vision, (f) focus on short wins, (g) refuse to let up, (h) maintain momentum, and (i) change the culture. These steps remind leaders that they cannot lead change alone.

Understanding that organizational development means improvement, Anderson (2003) reported that most researchers find that successful districts tend to work simultaneously on multiple dimensions of restructuring change to support improvement in student learning. Certain areas may be the focus of more intensive district development and intervention at different times. Adams and Jean-Marie (2011) discussed reform being diffused across the entire district: "Reform is more likely to spread across school actors when social conditions establish a shared understanding of planned change, support formative evaluations of practice, foster collective expertise, and cultivate a cohesive social network to sustain change" (p. 15-16). A collaborative relationship between the superintendent and the curriculum director can foster collective expertise and develop that social network.

Like Kotter and Cohen (2002), Durand et al. (2016) argued that adaptive leaders recognize that one or two persons located at the top of the organizational hierarchy are unlikely to know all that they need to know and do all that they need to do to address the complex problems of a school district. Blum-DeStefano and Drago-Severson (2018) agreed that change is led by strengthening collaborative structures, which also increases confidence. These leaders shift the importance of leadership as a function and activity to others situated lower on the organizational hierarchy. Still discussing hierarchy, Sheppard et al. (2009) stated that districts often have a traditional hierarchy and are resistant to collaboration. The inherent flaws of hierarchies are how they “inevitably foster authoritarianism and its destructive offspring: distrust, dishonesty, territoriality, toadying, and fear” (Leavitt, 2003, p. 102). Oftentimes a collaborative style of leadership is perceived as weakness. As opposed to working collaboratively, superintendents are expected to “fix” the problems (Leavitt, 2003).

Daly and Finnigan (2011) concurred that organizational reform efforts are socially constructed. They are either supported or constrained by relational structures. Even in the business setting, system-wide improvement is linked to the quality of relationships across the organization. It could be inferred that these leaders within central office must be tied to one another, in order to create the structure needed to create a culture of collective efficacy, trust and consequently improvement.

Conclusion

This literature review detailed what researchers have discovered regarding the research question—what are the actions, beliefs, attitudes, qualities, social structures, and processes of a collaborative relationship between the superintendent and curriculum director? Specific responsibilities of the superintendent related to curriculum and instruction were explored firstly. The responses varied from developing and manifesting the instructional vision (Clare, 1991; Petersen, 1999) to being a community builder and political actor (Murphy, 2002).

Next the literature explored the work of the assistant superintendent, who manages everything that pertains to teaching and learning, ensuring the success of the superintendent (Conley & Cooper, 2010). This work is further detailed by literature on the central office and/or middle management, which strengthens school districts by ensuring that they connect with and support building leaders (Rothman, 2009). Additionally, central office administrators undergird the superintendent by communicating the district vision to all stakeholders, including staff and the community (Bjork, 1993).

This literature review also discussed the theoretical constructs on which my research is built, strategic and transformational leadership. Strategic and transformational leaders inspire those that follow them to go above and beyond expectations. Transformational leaders are bound together with their followers in the reform process (Northouse, 2016), while strategic leaders empower their followers to take the lead and create systemic change (Hickman, 2016).

Following was a closer look at effective leadership models, in which researchers supported creating collective leadership (Gamble, 2013) and developing strong social networks (Daly et al., 2016). This led to a deeper discussion of collective trust and collective efficacy. Collective trust involves members of the organization having the ability to be vulnerable with

one another (Holtzman, 2012). Collective efficacy describes belief constructs regarding the capacity of the entire organization, and utilizing social capital theory to create reform (Goddard et al., 2000). Reform and organizational development or change are enacted, in part, by holding instructional leaders and staff accountable to district improvement initiatives (Elmore, 2003). These reforms are often socially constructed and enhanced by relational structures (Daly & Finnigan, 2011).

As asserted earlier in this study, the superintendent and the curriculum director are two of the most influential positions in a local education agency or school district. Together they are responsible for creating structures and policies that allow principals and teachers to support children in the classroom. None of the literature reviewed dealt with how the curriculum director and the superintendent relate specifically to one another—what their relationship looks and sounds like. My research will fill that gap. Chapter three explains the specifics of my research methods which identify the actions, beliefs, attitudes, qualities, social structures, and processes of a collaborative relationship between the superintendent and curriculum director, and the resulting grounded theory.

Chapter 3: Methods

Introduction

Chapter 3 explains the research process used to conduct a grounded theory study exploring the following question: What are the actions, beliefs, attitudes, qualities, social structures, and processes of a collaborative relationship between the superintendent and curriculum director? Qualitative research is identified and explained, along with the rationale for selecting that type of research. Further emphasis is placed on grounded theory, the specific method employed. Additionally, this chapter describes the research participants and how and why they were selected. Finally, the data collection process and the theories on which the data analysis were based are detailed.

Qualitative Methods

Nazir (2016) discussed the ontological (nature of reality), epistemological (nature of knowledge), and axiological (nature of values) questions regarding methodological choices. The researcher is advised to begin by clarifying her positions on these questions along spectrums: what is seen versus what is known about the phenomenon and what the researcher values or holds important. Taken a step further, the researcher must be aware of empirical evidence and how it connects to the literature and her personal values. Miles et al. (2014) claimed that, while investigating phenomena, the researcher's role is to gain a holistic and systemic overview of the environment, inclusive of social arrangements and explicit and implicit rules.

According to Nazir (2016), characteristics of these concepts (ontological, epistemological, and axiological) include: the refusal of subject-object dichotomy--human

experience over traditional notions of reality or non-reality; avoidance of scientific reductionism--not reducing experiences to the empirical, understanding that human experience is embedded in thoughts, feelings, actions, intuitions, artifacts, and memories; and search for essences--consciousness is made up of structures that can be discerned by the careful observer--these structures reflect the true nature or essence of the phenomenon. Carspecken (1996) asserted that methodological theories and their selection provide the principles which govern research design, assist with the development of field techniques, and support the interpretation of data. Also, qualitative social research investigates human phenomena that do not lend themselves to quantitative methods.

Grounded Theory

In grounded theory, a researcher must explore basic social processes, interactions, and adaptive behaviors of all actors in the environment. Heath and Cowley (2004) noted that social interactions create meaning and shape society. This meaning is created by symbolic interactionism--meaning being conferred on the social world by interaction of actors, and the investigation of basic social processes--or how people interact with one another. Meaning is also created by the concept of the looking glass self. In this concept, individuals are self-aware--able to see themselves from the perspective of others and adapt behavior per situation. She must enter the research open to realizing new meaning while collecting and analyzing data. Knowledge is increased by generating new theories.

[Grounded theory] gives researchers the opportunity to view the world from the perspective of the participants. It allows for identification of general concepts, the development of theoretical explanations that reach beyond the known, and offers new insights into a variety of experiences and phenomena. (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 6)

Grounded theory offers an explanation or “why” an event happens. Field observations and interviews provide an opportunity to see the social interactions and hear the self-reflections which create meaning and shape society.

According to Gehman et al. (2018), grounded theory is not a singular approach, but a heterogeneous set of approaches. These methods provide researchers with diverse philosophies and toolkits for studying and theorizing the actions of organizations and people. Researchers should note similarities and differences among emerging categories. Noting these similarities allows for a systematic presentation of both first-order analysis, derived from informant-centric terms or codes, and second-order analysis, derived from researcher-centric concepts, themes, and dimensions. There should be a progression from raw data to first-order codes to second-order theoretical themes and dimensions. According to Saldaña (2016), codes are heuristic, creating meaning and supporting discovery. Their analysis and interpretation will reflect the constructs and theories that initially structured the study. The grounded theory is generated by showing the dynamic relationships among the emerging concepts.

Saldana (2016) defined theory as “... a rich statement with accompanying narrative to expand on its meaning...explaining if/then or how/why...” (p. 281). Gehman et al. (2018) went further to discuss theory building--to move from data to theory. Theory building is testable, generalizable, logically coherent, and empirically valid--normative or descriptive, and either process or variance based. Sometimes, the goal is to create a fundamentally new theory, while at other times the goal is to elaborate on an existing theory.

In this qualitative study, I developed a grounded theory regarding the relationship between the superintendent and the curriculum director. As the researcher, I was “essentially the main instrument in the study” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 9), and I remained cognizant of my current

professional experiences which have supplied me with pre-conceived notions (Gehman et al., 2018). The following section describes the participants in the study, who allowed me to view their organizations from their perspectives and develop my theoretical explanation with the accompanying narrative (Corbin & Straus, 2015; Saldana, 2016).

Participants and Context

Three superintendent and curriculum director relationships were studied. Pseudonyms for school districts are: Apple Blossom, Cherry Tree, and Dogwood. I am either acquainted with or have a direct connection to the superintendent or curriculum director in each of these districts. These connections supported immediate access, or convenience sampling (Miles, et al., 2014). Upon further research on these districts, the sampling proved to be more homogeneous and purposeful, per the demographic and social characteristics of each. All have African American superintendents. Additionally, each district has a majority of African American students. According to the Great Schools (n.d.) website, the student populations range between 1,000–6,000 students, and the percentages of students receiving free and reduced lunch range from 60–85%. These demographics and social characteristics are detailed in Table 1.0 below.

Table 1*Site Demographics*

District	Number of Schools	Number of Students Served	% of African American Students	% of Students eligible to receive Free and Reduced Lunch	Race/Sex of Superintendent
CherryTree	6	1,800	73%	85%	AAM
Dogwood	4	1,000	79%	81%	AAM
AppleBlossom	11	4,000	57%	69%	AAF

Note. AAF=African American Female; AAM=African American Male; LAT=Latinx Male; WHTM=White Male

Upon receiving Institutional Review Board approval, I immediately began contacting districts. Initial contact was via email. I then followed up with a phone call within five business days—to either make another attempt at initiating contact, or to plan the first in-person meeting. Ideally the phone conversation would have been followed by a face-to-face meeting within the next 7–10 business days in order to discuss the nature of the research. However, my efforts to contact participants were impeded by COVID-19. The pressures of planning for the opening of school in the midst of a pandemic slowed response times. The virtual interviews—using the Google Meet platform--were scheduled via phone. These initial meetings should have taken place within 21–30 days from initial contact in order to begin the data collection process; however, the data selection process was closer to 30–45 days. Additionally, I planned to attend more than one educational event, but COVID-19 restrictions impeded such opportunities; thus, I had to attend one virtual educational event.

Data Sources and Collection

During the initial email, phone conversation and follow-up emails, a schedule was determined for the upcoming data collection: completion of the pre-survey, pre-interview, my

attendance at a virtual educational event, and the follow-up interview. Pre-surveys were sent immediately following initial contact. When designing the study, it was decided that I would continue with whoever consented to participate. All six of the participants who were approached gave their consent.

Following the interview protocol detailed in Appendix A, I conducted one-on-one, 30–60-minute interviews with each participant. These questions were selected based upon their ability to assist in determining thoughts, actions, social arrangements, implicit and explicit rules, as well as social processes of the relationship between the superintendent and curriculum director (Heath & Crowley, 2014; Miles et al., 2014; Nazir, 2016). These interviews were conducted prior to attending the educational event. They were recorded and transcribed. At the virtual educational events, field notes were taken. A post interview was held, within a week or so to ensure clarity of the events--information shared and actions observed. Follow-up interview questions were:

1. What were the expected outcomes of this meeting/event?
2. Do you feel that they were achieved? What are your success indicators? What barriers prevented these outcomes being achieved?
3. What action steps were assigned to you as a result of the meeting/event? Which action steps were assigned to your superintendent/curriculum director?

The collection of the pre-surveys, attending these educational events, and conducting these interviews provided triangulation regarding the collaboration (or not) that takes place between the superintendents and curriculum directors. The collected data were analyzed until saturation was achieved, as described in the next section.

Data Analysis

The core of grounded theory is the data analysis process in that theory is generated from the data. To further explain, coding is “...an iterative, inductive, yet reductive process that organizes data, from which the researcher can then construct themes, essences, descriptions, and theories...” (Walker & Myrick, 2006, p. 62). Firstly, the data was coded and then systematically analyzed to verify any assertions. In the second process, the data was inspected for properties that created categories with memos used to track the analysis. (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Walker & Myric, 2006).

Coding is what transports researchers and their data from transcript to theory. Qualitative codes are essence capturing and when they are clustered together in similarity and pattern, categories are created. Categories facilitate generation of themes and build a foundation for theory development (Saldana, 2016).

My research goal was to be immersed in the environment and to be the instrument (Miles et al., 2014) that documents a sample of the superintendents’ and curriculum directors’ lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990). I wanted to participate attentively (Ingold, 2017). COVID-19 safety protocols altered the level of immersion and participation possible. I had to depend on the pre-survey, interview responses, and my field notes from the virtual educational events.

My participants were selected from a descriptive lens, with the research goal of identifying a typical collaborative relationship between the superintendent and curriculum director (Gerring & Cojocaru, 2016). From the data available to me, I documented the beliefs, attitudes, social structures, qualities and processes, actions, and essences that I observed and experienced in the surveys, interview transcripts, field notes, and memos. Grounded theory methods and processes, detailed in Chapter 4, gave me the tools to organize and code my raw data so that conclusions were drawn and from which a theory was developed to answer the

research question: What are the actions, beliefs, attitudes, qualities, social structures, and processes of a collaborative relationship between the superintendent and curriculum director?

Chapter 4: Findings and Results

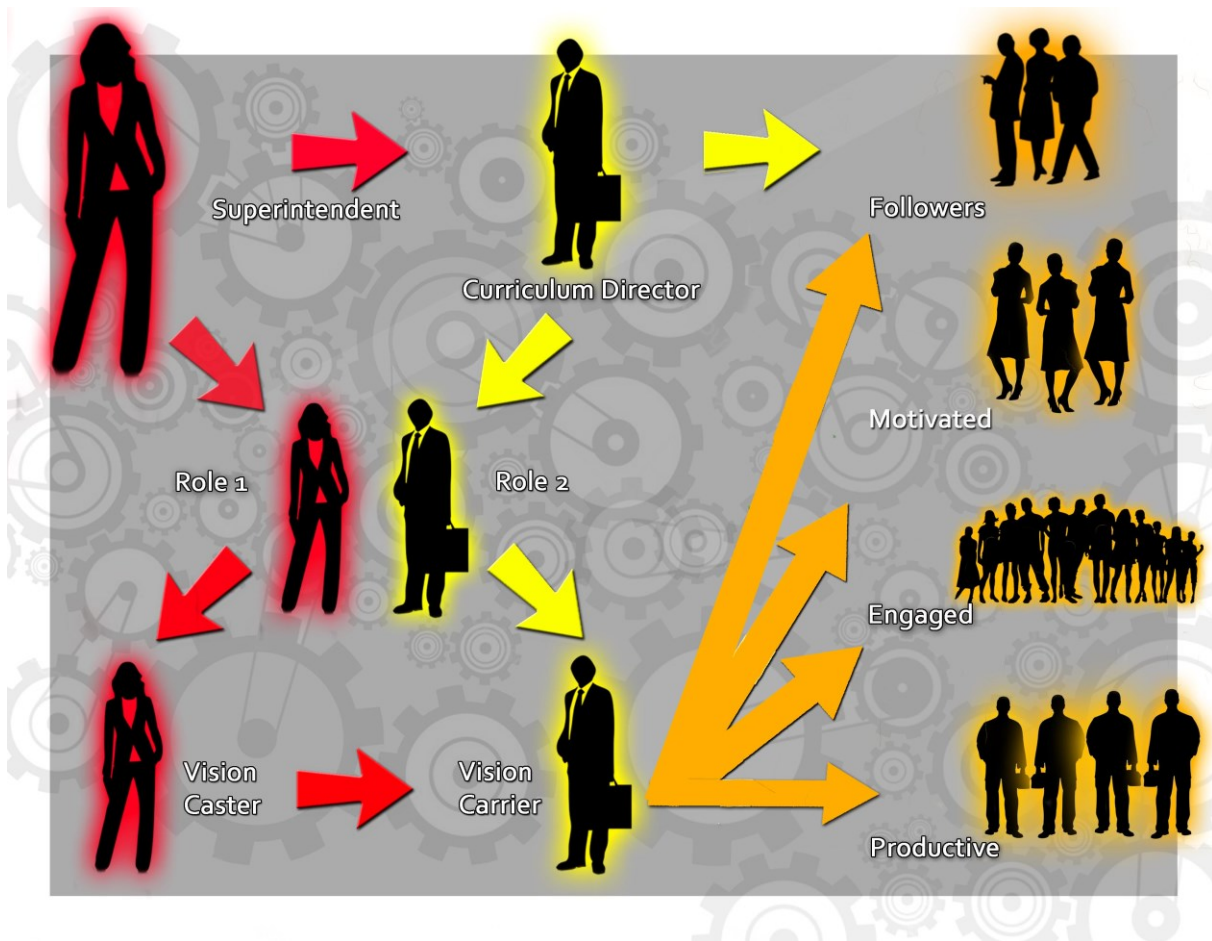
Introduction

This chapter contains the findings of the grounded theory methodology study conducted to answer the research question: What are the actions, beliefs, attitudes, qualities, social structures and processes of a collaborative relationship between the superintendent and curriculum director?

The chapter includes (a) participant demographics; (b) participants' roads to leadership; (c) data analysis of transcripts from the survey, pre-interview, educational event, and event follow-up interview; (d) tables and charts to provide examples of categories and coded data; and (e) three themes. Distilled from the data using constant comparison and highlighted with participant quotes, the three themes are role identification as it relates to vision, collaboration, and motivation/engagement of followers. These themes evolved into a grounded theory, which states:

If superintendents and curriculum directors understand and identify with their respective roles as either vision caster or vision carrier, and they have a coherent understanding of the definition of collaboration, they will be able to collaborate successfully. An outcome of this successful collaboration is followers that are motivated, engaged, and productive.

See Figure 1.1

Figure 1.1*Vision Casters and Carriers*

The grounded theory will be explored more thoroughly in Chapter Five.

Participants

Six participants--three superintendents and three curriculum directors agreed to participate in this study. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for participant sites and participants' names. Site #1 is the Apple Blossom School District. The superintendent is A. Red and the curriculum director is B. Teaching. Site #2 is the Cherry Tree School District. The superintendent is C. Black and the curriculum director is D. Learning. Site #3 is the Dogwood

School District. The superintendent is E. Green and the curriculum director is F. Leading. Site and participant demographics are detailed in Tables 2 and 3 below.

Table 2

Site and Participant Demographics

District	Number of Schools	Number of Students Served	% of African American Students	% of Students Receiving Free and Reduced Lunch	Race/Sex of Superintendent	Race/Sex of Curriculum Director
1	11	4,000	57%	69%	AAF	LATM
2	6	1,800	73%	85%	AAM	AAF
3	4	1,000	79%	81%	AAM	WHTM

Note. AAF=African American Female; AAM=African American Male; LAT=Latinx Male; WHTM= White Male

Table 3

Participant Descriptors

Site	Pseudonym	Role	Level of Education	Years in Role	Length of time working together
Apple Blossom	A. Red	Superintendent	Education Specialist	8	1
Apple Blossom	B. Teaching	Curriculum Director	Doctorate	15	1
Cherry Tree	C. Black	Superintendent	Doctorate	9	2
Cherry Tree	D. Learning	Curriculum Director	Masters	2	2
Dogwood	E. Green	Superintendent	Doctorate	11	1
Dogwood	F. Leading	Curriculum Director	Education Specialist	1	1

Participant Roads to Leadership

Superintendent

Each participant had a unique career path. Superintendent A. Red always wanted to be a teacher and became one. According to her she was “tricked” into taking the principal perception test. When her principal quit mid-year, the staff requested her. She went from the principalship to the central office, filling several interim roles. This led to her being noticed by leaders at the state level, and subsequently appointed to a superintendency, for which she did not apply.

C. Black, on the other hand, was looking to expand his influence and become a principal. He had previously been a teacher and an instructional coach. As he grew in this role within a small district, he began to think of expanding his influence even further and sought a post as superintendent. E. Green came to a mutual agreement with his superintendent when he was a principal. He describes it as “being grown and needing to get your own place.” With her blessing, he began his quest to become a superintendent.

Curriculum Director

B. Teaching experienced at least 20 years of leadership experience at the central office and building level--including the superintendency. If one looks at his previous positions, curriculum seems to be his true love--he has been a curriculum director, assistant superintendent, and director of teaching and learning. D. Learning wanted the opportunity to implement strategies that she was working on in theory in her previous position. She wanted to take that expertise and apply it “in a place where it is needed most.” F. Leading had what he described as a “convoluted” path including experience in athletics, technology, and federal programs.

The backstories of these participants--how they came to be in their current roles, along with time in these specific roles, levels of education, and even length of time serving together

give context to the data that were collected. The participant demographics, as well as the demographics of the students they service, all add to the narrative. The next section will detail how they participated, what data were collected, and from which source.

Data

Data Collection

Participants completed a pre-survey, participated in a pre-interview, allowed the researcher to attend one educational event, and participated in an event follow-up interview. The surveys were collected electronically via Google Forms, with the responses consolidated. The interviews and site visits were virtual, utilizing the Google Meet platform. Interviews were audio/video recorded and transcribed. The surveys and interview protocols are in Appendices A-C.

Data Analysis

After all data were collected, first, second, and third-cycle coding were conducted. First-cycle coding was conducted by hand--printing, cutting, sorting and matching data, according to the research question and the theoretical frameworks: strategic and transformational leadership theories. Coding included a priori (provisional) and attribute coding (Creswell, 2013; Elliott, 2018; Saldana, 2016).

A priori codes do not limit the analysis but open up the data for further analysis. Using a provisional list of codes supports alignment to the theoretical framework and answers the research question (Creswell, 2013; Elliot, 2018; Saldana, 2016). Thus, the following provisional codes, or a priori codes, were used to make sense of and organize the data initially:

- superintendent
- curriculum director

- collaborative relationships
- actions and processes
- beliefs and attitudes
- social structures
- mission, vision, values
- meeting motivational needs
- empowering to create change
- desired future/vision
- achieve beyond expectations
- bound together in the transformational process

These codes were based on the research question and the theoretical constructs.

Attribute coding was utilized to support additional organization of the data. Attribute coding included (a) participant role--superintendent or curriculum director; and (b) data points in either survey, pre-interview, educational event, and/or event follow up interview (Saldana, 2016).

In the second round of coding, I categorized the first cycle codes. I took the data that I had recorded from each data point--pre-survey, pre-interview, event summary, event follow up interview--and cut and pasted them underneath the corresponding category. Literally cutting, stapling and paper clipping my data into codes and categories, I utilized the tabletop method: "...a spatial arrangement of coded and categorized data . . . [to] touch the data, until the organization made sense" (p. 230–231). This was basically working backwards, trying to make sense of my first cycle coding. Code mapping supports auditing the study and showing how codes and categories are identified and re-organized (Saldana, 2016).

Furthermore, second cycle coding utilized open coding, which is described as happening line by line, identifying that which is conceptually similar. Open coding "...implies a truth awaiting discovery..." (Blair, 2015, p.18). A cognitive model was constructed of the data according to my perspective (Chinn & Brewer, 2001). This took place after a priori and attribute coding, as the following codes not directly related to the research question or the theoretical constructs began to emerge: thoughts about their teams, NOT indicators of effective leadership, operations, interaction with community and stakeholders, vision, and lived experiences that led to leadership.

Table 4 below details the second cycle of coding, including open coding and organizing data into categories.

Table 4*Second Cycle Code Mapping and Open Coding*

Category (No. of coded passages)	No. of subcategories	Category definition with subcategories (No. of coded passages)
Superintendent (56)	6	Definition of Collaboration (3), Characteristics of a Leader (1), Interaction w/Community and Stakeholders (5), Roles/Descriptors (17), Vision (7), Lived Experiences that led to Leadership (23)
Curriculum Director (71)	4	Definition of collaboration (2), Vision (6), Roles (40), Lived Experiences that led to Leadership (23)
Collaboration (133)	7	Relationships (10), Indicators of Collaboration (14), Actions and processes (68), Qualities of Collaboration (11), Effective Leadership Descriptors (17), NOT indicators of effective leadership (6), Beliefs and attitudes (7)
Social Structures (117)	2	Meetings (96), Operations (21)
Strategic Leadership (50)	4	Mission, vision and values (9), CEO and her top team (3), Meeting motivational needs (24), Empowering to create change (14)
Transformational Leadership (32)	3	Desired future/vision (4), Achieve beyond expectations (5), Bound together in transformational process (23)

Following the table top and data touching processes, third cycle coding was conducted by reviewing first and second cycle codes for commonality and identifying pattern and focus codes. Pattern coding is a type of clustering that supports the development of categories. Pattern codes are inferential and help to identify themes. Focus codes were organized under these categories. These focus codes were based on thematic or conceptual similarities. They are the most frequent

and make analytic sense. Pattern and focus coding organize data without undue attention to properties and dimension (Saldana, 2016). After this analysis, additional categories and codes which began to emerge and were revised included: collaboration; characteristics of a superintendent/curriculum director, which became leadership descriptors; roles and vision were combined; and theoretical constructs became subcategories to followers. I began to rearrange the existing data per these focus codes, described in the table below:

Table 5*Third Cycle Pattern and Focus Codes*

Category (No. of coded passages)	Subcategories	Category definition with subcategories (No. of coded passages)
Collaboration (118)	None	Definition (3), relationships (10), qualities (33), indicators (17), actions/processes (55)
Followers (79)	Strategic Leadership Transformational Leadership	Motivation (15), CEO empowering her Top Team to create change (9), Achieving beyond expectations (8), Bound together in the transformational process by beliefs and attitudes (47)
Roles (123)	Leadership Descriptors Vision	Superintendent (18), Curriculum director (37), Effective (28), Ineffective (22), Definition (14), Casters (1), Carriers (3)
Social Structures (67)	Meetings Communication	Meetings (35), Instruction and Operations (32)

Coding is a cyclical act and several cycles of coding are often needed to manage, filter, highlight, and focus the data. This supports the generating of categories, themes, and theory

building (Saldana, 2016). My analysis—detailed by first, second and third-cycle coding, supported by code mapping—produced the following themes, with the subordinating categories:

(a) The theme of **role identification as it relates to vision** provided clarity regarding how one functions in the organization. Functioning in the organization relates to the vision of the organization. The vision of the organization encompasses the responsibilities to manifest the vision. The following are the theme's subordinating categories:

- roles within the organization: superintendent and curriculum director
- vision for the organization: definition, casters and carriers
- leadership descriptors: effective and ineffective

(b) The theme of **collaboration** includes having a coherent understanding of working together to achieve a common goal and what it looks and sounds like, supported by the following subordinating categories:

- definition
- relationships
- qualities
- indicators
- actions/processes

(c) The third theme of **motivation/engagement of followers** includes understanding that clarity regarding roles, vision, and collaboration creates motivated and engaged followers, indicated by the following subordinating categories:

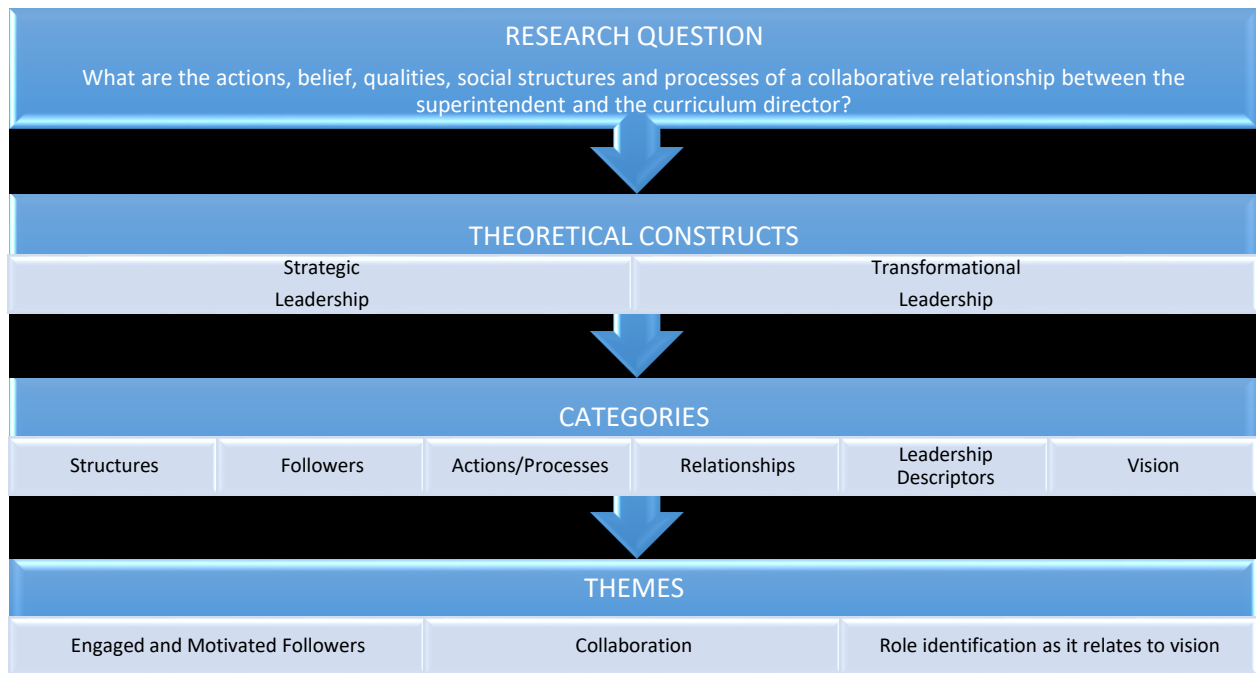
- followers

- social Structures

The figure below illustrates my thought process from the first, second and third coding iterations, and the development of the themes.

Figure 2

Research Question to Theories to Categories-to-Themes



Discussion of Themes

Within this section, each theme will be detailed with corresponding data to support its development. Participants' quoted data highlight their perspectives on their roles and those of their co-leaders, their thoughts on collaboration, and what they believe motivates their followers.

Role Identification as it Relates to Vision

Role identification gives more detail regarding participants' perception of their function within the organization. What is their job description? Participants were asked to describe their roles as well as the roles of their respective superintendents and/or curriculum directors.

Embedded in and connected to these perceptions of role are each participant's ideas regarding vision. What is vision and what is each participant's role in that vision? Lastly, regardless of role, or function in manifesting the vision, what is good leadership? The participants give their ideas of what good leadership looks like and what it does not. The superintendents' and curriculum directors' responses to these questions, largely collected from pre-interviews and surveys, are as varied as the participants.

As detailed in Figure 1, this theme, role identification as it relates to vision, is organized as follows: (a) superintendents' and curriculum directors' perceptions of each leader's role, and their definitions of vision, casters, and carriers; and (b) leadership descriptors as effective or ineffective.

Superintendent

Curriculum director B. Teaching describes the superintendent as the "face of the organization" as well as courageous and committed. According to the curriculum director, the superintendent must build relationships with stakeholders--staff, board, the community, area businesses, faith-based entities, universities, etc. and maintain a strong media presence. These relationships are an example of strategic leaders contributing to the triple bottom line of financial, social, and environmental capital (Carter & Greer, 2013). Curriculum director D. Learning used the metaphor of a supreme court justice to describe her superintendent. She stated, "...he gives the final resolution, the final approval, the final say..." He is seen as the even keeled, calm place of judgement, when there are places of chaos." Curriculum director F. Leading said the superintendent has the "30,000-foot view" and supervises the overall operations of the district, including the principals.

Superintendents described themselves as having the broad vision of the district in mind at all times, literally being the one to “cast the vision” per superintendent, E. Green. The strategic leader and her dominant coalition are responsible for creating and communicating a clear vision (Cote, 2017). Superintendent A. Red asserted that it is a must that superintendents constantly consider connections to departments and external stakeholders. With a slightly opposing viewpoint, superintendent C. Black asserted that the superintendent is first responsible to the board, carrying through their goals, objectives, and vision for the district; and must respond to the community and consider the wellbeing of the staff, ensuring that the “direction that’s been set is followed through and goals are accomplished.” These descriptions are indicative of a strategic leader whose responsibilities include leadership of self, leadership of others, and leadership of the organization (Bonardi et al, 2018).

Curriculum Director

When superintendents were asked about the role of the curriculum director, superintendent A. Red stated that the curriculum director was supposed to “get in the weeds of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.” The curriculum director is also to challenge or question the superintendent if she loses sight of the overall mission, vision and day to day work of the district. According to superintendent C. Black, the curriculum director is responsible for detailed implementation and management of the academic program K-12.

Curriculum directors describe their work as being responsible for ensuring a guaranteed and viable curriculum--priority standards, pacing guides, assessments, and instructional routines. Some are also grant and assessment coordinators. One curriculum director, D. Learning described the role as being “the conduit of compliance and implementation.” She further elaborated that she manages and filters all of the district’s compliance and implementation

issues. Curriculum director, F. Leading stated simply that he is “in charge of curriculum” --what is taught and how and with what tools. F. Leading also described himself as an umbrella thinker--big picture first, and he keeps his superintendent grounded and attends to necessary details.

Curriculum directors create reports, analyze data, and generally support (or carry) their superintendents’ visions in any way they can. “I help her to be successful. If she’s successful, our children are successful,” said B. Teaching.

Definition of Vision

Vision is defined as the power of seeing, conceiving and discernment (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). To curriculum director F. Leading, vision is the desired future, or achieving a successful outcome for an organization. According to superintendent C. Black, vision is considered to be established by the superintendent and the board of education and consists of their goals and objectives. This vision is described as the direction that’s been set and must be kept in mind at all times. Vision is the big picture and the common organizational goal per superintendent A. Red. Transformational leaders define an idealized picture of the future based around organizational values (Keske et al., 2018). Superintendent participants had very specific views regarding responsibilities toward this vision, identified by the terms casters and carriers.

Caster. Merriam-Webster defines casting as sending, putting, or bringing forth (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Superintendent E. Green affirms this thought, stating that he is the visionary person, or the one who sees, conceives and sends forth. He asserted, “Being that I cast the vision, I don’t always look at the steps to make sure that vision is attained.” Another superintendent, C. Black stressed the necessity of being able to be that visionary, when others cannot see where he is going. As casters of vision, they need carriers, or individuals who will help bring the vision to pass.

Carrier. The definition of carry is to move while supporting, convey by direct communication, direct the course of, and when necessary, influence by emotional appeal (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). “My curriculum director carries that vision to fruition. His job is to implement my vision. It’s his job to fill in the blanks. I don’t look at the blanks. I look where I’m going,” stated superintendent E. Green. Superintendent C. Black agreed that the curriculum director is to enact the vision established by the board and the superintendent. He also stated that it causes conflict when a person is not aligned to the mission, vision and goals of the organization. The superintendents’ perspectives regarding their roles and their connection to the vision of the organization is aligned with strategic leadership, in which the CEO establishes the organization’s mission, vision and values (Hickman, 2016).

Leadership descriptors

As participants discussed effective leadership—its description, characteristics, and strengths and weaknesses—some very clear indicators emerged. Participants had definitive ideas about what does and does not make an effective leader, and how they see these indicators within their superintendent and/or curriculum director colleagues.

Effective. Curriculum director B. Teaching described his superintendent as leading with passion, being influential, and having a deep understanding of curriculum; she “values every single human being that she comes into contact with.” According to B. Teaching, other indicators of being a “great leader” are keeping one's finger on the pulse of the organization, while bringing into the district dollars, resources, and partnerships. Regarding his own practice, curriculum director B. Teaching feels that he has a moral responsibility to “do right” by kids and staff. He said that office hours are for interacting with stakeholders and systems are created after hours. Lastly, he values strength-based leadership, creative thinking, tenacity, and determination,

both of which encompass strategic and transformational leadership. Strategic leaders anticipate trends, have broad networks of support, and sustain culture by infusing ethics into the systems of the organization (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000; Sarfraz, 2017).

Superintendent C. Black appreciates innovation and efficiency, while curriculum director D. Learning feels that effective leaders recognize and support strengths, demonstrate fairness, handle pressure, and are not quick to place blame or pronounce judgement. She prefers working with leaders who have a keen sense of awareness and integrity. Superintendent E. Green identifies commitment and passion as key leadership descriptors. Curriculum director F. Leading believes that leaders should hire competent people and trust them to do what is required. These indicators of effective leadership embody transformational leadership which supports concern for followers, valuing and praising efforts, and inspiring them to do what's best for the organization (Keske et al., 2018).

Ineffective. According to superintendent A. Red, ineffective leaders do not show zeal and passion towards students. They are not team players, willingly sharing their skills with others. This also applies to leaders who speak negatively, choose complacency over learning, give up, or demonstrate an unwillingness to put in the work. Superintendent C. Black struggles with those who do not possess his same level of commitment. He also feels that ineffective leaders struggle with push back, taking the path of least resistance, instead of standing their ground. Curriculum director D. Learning identifies unfounded bias as a significant challenge to being an effective leader. Indecision, the inability to multi-task, lack of vision, and dishonesty are high on the list of deal breakers for these leaders. Ineffective leaders are not collaborative.

Collaboration

As detailed in Figure 1, this theme, collaboration, is organized as follows: (a) relationship qualities and indicators of collaboration, and (b) and actions/processes that support collaboration. This section on the theme of collaboration, not only defines the term but attempts to make it as transparent as possible. A discussion of collaborative relationships, the qualities of these relationships and the indicators of collaborative relationships ensues. Participants provide more detail regarding their interactions with one another and their followers.

Definition of Collaboration

Participants agree that collaboration entails multiple stakeholders working together to achieve a common goal that results in a successful outcome for the organization. Collaboration is also described as being similar to cooperation. “Most collaboration requires leadership, although the form of leadership can be social within a decentralized and egalitarian group,” stated superintendent C. Black. Curriculum director D. Learning expounded on these thoughts saying that collaboration involves collective dialogue--talking, thinking, reflecting, processing, and innovating ideas together to get to a space where collectively the team can agree upon a set of actions or commitments in order to solve a dilemma. D. Learning also asserted, “[Collaboration] requires true efficacy in terms of collaboration, stretching your thinking, and working with others to achieve a common good.” Collaboration is supported through purposeful relationships that demonstrate these qualities and indicators.

Relationships

Leaders in all three districts believe that their teams demonstrate the qualities needed to build collaborative relationships. One example indicative of collaboration is the leaders at the Apple Blossom district who asserted that they often read the same books and share values and beliefs. This same team spoke of supporting one another and ensuring the success of each other's

work. Words used to describe this connection are “powerful” and “mastermind.” The team at Dogwood district spoke of open-door policies and the ability to ask questions whenever needed. The Cherry Tree district is described as a unique place where collaboration is authentic and communication is open. The phrase “thought partner” was used to describe other leaders with whom to merge ideas and confer before key initiatives, instructional or operational, are implemented. These leaders have identified being like-minded, asking hard questions, and working through those answers together as indicators of collaborative relationships.

Qualities

Qualities that support collaboration are illustrated by the superintendent of the Apple Blossom district who always debriefs with her top team, or her Masterminds--curriculum director, human resources director and finance director--after meeting with principals. She is said to ask such questions as:

- What were the learnings?
- What were the possibilities?
- What should be considered?
- What were the missed opportunities?

Superintendent A. Red is said to encourage her leaders to reflect on their practice. She explained that clear purpose and goals, as well as clear steps in meeting those goals, are necessary.

B. Teaching discussed such qualities as personal humility, professional will, and the genuine commitment to talk your truth in collaboration with others. A willingness to listen, the ability to nurture and being a servant leader are also noted. D. Learning spoke of her ability to pull people together and her understanding of situational leadership and emotional intelligence as being qualities that support collaboration. This is an example of transformational leadership-- a

leadership style based on inspirational communication, using appeals and emotion to arouse followers' emotions and motivation (Keske et al., 2018).

Indicators

When looking at indicators of collaboration, leaders at the Apple Blossom district said that they can be apart and say the same thing. They want to hear each other's ideas. Superintendent A. Red described the connection between herself and her leaders as "powerful- there's no challenge we can't conquer." Additionally, in the Apple Blossom district decisions are made collectively through dialogue. Curriculum director F. Leading shared that due to his superintendent's open-door policy, he can literally walk in and discuss whatever is needed. According to curriculum director B. Teaching, other indicators are listening with the heart and then taking precise action.

Actions/processes

Collaborative actions and processes include having a district goal-setting protocol that ensures that decisions facilitate progress toward benchmarks in the Apple Blossom district. Superintendent A. Red is a big believer in having high expectations, while providing high levels of support. Transformational leaders have high expectations of their followers. Superintendent A. Red also utilizes the Cognitive Coaching strategies of pausing before responding, paraphrasing what she just heard, probing or asking a clarifying question, and presuming positive intent (Costa et al., 2018; Cote, 2017). Superintendent E. Green and curriculum director F. Leading identify discussing plans to determine the best way to operate and "talking about everything" as processes that support their collaboration. These processes are not as consistent in the Cherry Tree district, at least not with the superintendent and curriculum director. According to

superintendent C. Black, his interactions with his curriculum director are not as frequent as he might want them to be. He is not always certain that they are on the “same page.”

Motivation/Engagement of Followers

Merriam-Webster states that to *motivate* is to be given a reason to act, and to *engage* is to attract and hold by influence (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Collaborative leadership influences followers and gives them a reason to be productive. Leadership style has a significant impact on organizational culture and follower behaviors (Carter & Greer, 2013). This section--with data collected from the pre-interview and surveys--looks at these terms and at followers through the lens of the theoretical constructs of strategic and transformational leadership. As detailed in Figure 1, this theme, motivation/engagement of followers, is organized thusly: (a) followers, through transformational leadership, achieve beyond expectations and are bound together in the transformational process by beliefs and attitudes; (b) followers, motivated by strategic leadership, are empowered leaders who create change, with all activities aligned to the mission and vision; and (c) social structures and meetings with effective communication model supporting followers' instructional and operational needs.

Followers/Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders have a pivotal role in precipitating change and adapting innovations. Leaders and followers are inextricably bound together in the transformational process (Northouse, 2016). Transformational leadership inspires and stimulates followers to develop leadership capacity and achieve extraordinary outcomes, beyond what they can imagine (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Achieving beyond expectations. According to curriculum director F. Leading, followers achieve beyond expectations when leaders are able to continuously support them to exceed their

capacities. He believes in pushing staff to limits they aren't aware of to move the organization forward. In the Apple Blossom district, this achievement was evident in principals taking the initiative to support staff with implementation of technology to support remote learning. As opposed to soliciting central office for support, principals provided the support themselves. This is an example of transformational leaders inspiring followers to be proactive, empowered, and innovative (Carter & Greer, 2013).

Bound together in the transformational process by beliefs and attitudes. The relationship between transformational leaders and their followers is often referred to as a bonding process (Carter & Greer, 2013). That bonding process is evident when leaders value the ideas that are brought to the table, per curriculum director B. Teaching. He also believes that it is important to “talk your truth and speak with courage” when collaborating with followers. The Apple Blossom district has three core principles or values:

1. increased excellence and support
2. voice-listen to others
3. access to leadership

Leaders in this district apprehend that achieving a common understanding is a dual responsibility and leads to the establishment of routines and systems. Leaders’ abilities to use their voices supports their being bound together in the transformational process.

As an example of being bound together in the transformational process, decisions regarding school re-entry were made collectively in the Apple Blossom district. There was a task force developed and staff, students, and parents were part of the decision-making process. In the Cherry Tree district, to support remote learning, all administrators were required to become Google certified. The superintendent led the way and was taking his test the following week.

Lastly, in the Dogwood district the superintendent and the curriculum director were planning to visit professional learning communities to join in conversations regarding teaching and learning. Also, superintendent E. Green was taking the team approach and planning to co-facilitate with the principals in reporting data to the board of education. All of these events are a result of transformational leaders inspiring, energizing, and intellectually stimulating their followers (Cote, 2017).

Followers/Strategic Leadership

Strategic leaders anticipate events and empower others to create strategic change as necessary (Hoskisson et al., 2013). Strategic leadership consists of the CEO and her dominant coalition. This team establishes mission, vision, and values to focus activities (Cote, 2017; Hickman, 2016). A clearly communicated organizational vision results in followers being persistent and consistent, achieving desired outcomes. And, a strategic leader's values can influence organizational performance and the escalation of follower commitment. Increased commitment and consistently achieved outcomes are indicators of follower motivation (Carter & Greer, 2013; Cote, 2017).

Motivation. Several leadership behaviors motivate followers. Curriculum director D. Learning believes that followers are motivated when a leader promotes, supports, and encourages the best out of them. Followers are also motivated by leaders who have a strong desire to remove barriers for the team so that the team can do their jobs effectively. Curriculum director D. Learning asserted that leadership is an honor and a responsibility that includes an "accountability to create a collective of people united around and moving toward achieving common goals." That responsibility also includes the persistence to solve problems and understand the root cause of the team's successes and challenges. Per D. Learning, these beliefs and attitudes

include having compassion and being ethical, while understanding that you are “leading people, not processes.” These beliefs may also cause one to struggle with those who do not possess the same level of shared commitment, per superintendent C. Black.

Superintendent A. Red added that ensuring that all voices are heard supports motivation. Additionally, she asserted that leaders must mobilize and inspire followers to achieve goals through perseverance. She said that leaders must “demonstrate the fortitude and ability to pivot and lead from the front, side and rear when needed.” Having high expectations and providing high levels of support, being nurturing, and having the ability to lift and influence are all behaviors that motivate followers.

Superintendent C. Black agreed that followers--whether individuals, groups, or entities--must be marshaled “towards the achievement of stated goals and objectives,” adding that often the expectation is progress, not perfection. Curriculum director B. Teaching adds that his superintendent is very straightforward, so that followers know her expectations. She addresses situations directly, not walking around “with rose colored glasses.” When there is conflict, she prefers to “unwrap it backwards,” looking for ways to mitigate the circumstances, fill a gap, or build a bridge. This is an example of the values which promote optimal organizational performance (Carter & Greer, 2013).

Superintendent empowering cabinet/senior leadership team to create change. The CEO gives her top team the flexibility to create change. This empowered change often takes the shape of decision-making. A leader’s decision-making is supported by her values and beliefs (Beard, 2018; Hickman, 2016). Curriculum director F. Leading stated that he regularly makes decisions regarding people, purchasing and resources, but keeps the superintendent in the loop because “the buck stops with him. If the news calls, it’s going to be the superintendent that they

speak to.” Superintendent E. Green confirms this practice, adding “if the principals have a problem, they’re coming to me. I tell them that’s what I told him to do.” According to superintendent E. Green, the curriculum director is empowered in that he “does his own thing within the scope of the vision.”

In the Cherry Tree district, the curriculum director makes decisions regarding professional learning. She shared that all directors are allowed to make such decisions regarding their departments. Superintendent C. Black discusses an occasion where an initiative was not being implemented with fidelity. He asked one of the principals who was successfully implementing to support her colleagues with some professional learning. He described this as “leaning on internal expertise, as opposed to the superintendent bringing down the hammer.”

In the Apple Blossom district, the top team--the superintendent, curriculum director, finance director, and the human resources director--readily acknowledge one another’s strengths, gifts, talents, and shortcomings—they are the dominant coalition (Cote, 2017). However, principals have the agency to create the agendas for the principal meetings--not the central office administrators. Principals determine which central office administrators attend, based on the need. Per superintendent A. Red, principals are encouraged to dialogue, problem solve and leverage district leadership support.

Social Structures

Followers being empowered to make change is a social structure. Social structures encompass meeting structure-- when, how, about what leaders meet, and with whom. These structures also detail methods of communication, as well as whether the emphasis is on instructional or operational issues. This data was collected during the pre-interview, event

summaries, and the event follow-up interviews. These components may or may not create an environment, or social structure, that supports collaboration.

Meetings. District leaders such as superintendents and curriculum directors are responsible for structures, systems, and district operations (Gamble, 2013; Jiangang et al., 2020). One such structure is meetings with district and building leaders. Superintendent A. Red insists that cabinet updates are sent to the board and building administrators. She feels that it is crucial to keep the outcomes at the forefront of all meetings and discussions. Leaders in her district expect to ask questions and collectively solve problems. Superintendent A. Red is adamant that they stick to the agenda and objectives only. Her meeting was conducted with a PowerPoint that included the agenda and outcomes. The outcomes are listed as I Can statements. Leaders regularly dialogue until a decision is made collectively.

In the Cherry Tree district, the leadership meeting had a shared agenda that included tips for modeling self-care as a connector to gather everyone's focus. The curriculum director, D. Learning explained that not much is left unsettled in these meetings, as the superintendent sets the agenda. She also said that they will follow up if "time to cool off" is needed, as they have "different viewpoints." However, in the same district, superintendent C. Black was still establishing a regular meeting time with his curriculum director for coherence and to be "on the same page." He recounted a task that was not completed in a timely manner, because he had not monitored progress consistently. C. Black also noted that his interactions are more frequent with his other leaders and often informal, stating that "some people check in daily at the end of the day."

Dogwood district curriculum director F. Leading stated that last year he and the superintendent generally met on Mondays to look at the “week at a glance.” He said that they have yet to “nail down” that weekly time this year; however, many of their meetings are informal. Most of the time, superintendent E. Green sets the leadership meeting agendas but shares them with the curriculum director. At this meeting, however, he did not have a printed agenda for his leadership meeting.

Communication. Whereas superintendents A. Red and C. Black made it a point of conversing with the team as they entered the meeting, superintendent E. Green got right to the business at hand. Also, the Apple Blossom and Dogwood district meetings were virtual. The Cherry Tree district meeting was in person, with everyone socially distanced and wearing masks. Lastly, A. Red reviewed the Seven Norms of Collaboration (Garmston & Wellman, 2016) at the beginning of her meetings. It is a regular practice that leaders in the Apple Blossom district use these research-based methods of listening and questioning, paraphrasing their understanding of meeting concepts to one another. There is an expectation of achieving clarity by the end of any discussion. Superintendent A. Red is demonstrating strategic leadership in that she attends to her followers’ needs by giving them tools for collaboration and to encourage understanding (Northouse, 2016).

Instruction and Operations. Superintendents and curriculum directors must strive to maintain the balance between instructional oversight—strategies and tools for teaching and learning and assessment, as well as operational matters—budgets, attendance, talent management, etc. School boards hold superintendents much more accountable for budget, personnel, and communications than evaluation of student learning, curriculum, and instruction

in their annual performance review (Bredeson & Kose, 2007). However, in the leadership meetings observed, superintendents attended to both curriculum and operations.

In the Cherry Tree district, superintendent E. Green was reiterating the importance of monitoring teaching and learning. Plans for professional development were discussed along with teacher supports for remote instruction. He also made it clear that Professional Learning Community schedules should be available for him and curriculum director F. Leading to visit and support. In the Apple Blossom district, superintendent A. Red reviewed COVID-19 safety precautions. Principals were seeking support for their teachers in improving their remote instruction. Curriculum director B. Teaching was taking the lead on preparing for the statewide Count Day.

Superintendent C. Black was concerned with teachers not using an agreed upon district protocol to support and organize instruction. He was also concerned about the integrity of the curriculum, with teachers possibly using resources that were not district approved. He planned a follow-up meeting with elementary principals to investigate further. The team was also getting familiar with the use of Clever as a single sign on tool. Curriculum director D. Learning supported the group with preparing to earn State Continuing Education Hours. These activities support the work of the district: supervision, monitoring, budgeting, instruction, curriculum, and accountability. Collaborative leaders must attend to all of them, while depending on one another's individual strengths (Jiangang et al., 2020).

Conclusion

This chapter detailed the results of the analysis, connected to the research question and the theoretical constructs. The six participants in this study helped to determine the actions,

beliefs, attitudes, qualities, social structures and processes of a collaborative relationship between the superintendent and curriculum director.

Grounded theory coding methods used included a priori and attribute coding in the first cycle, open coding and code mapping in the second cycle, and pattern and focus coding in the third cycle. The themes that emerged as success indicators of a collaborative relationship between the superintendent and curriculum director are: (a) **Role identification as it relates to vision**--Clarity regarding one's function in the organization, and how that function relates to the vision of the organization, including the responsibilities to manifest the vision; (b)

Collaboration--having a coherent understanding of working together to achieve a common goal, and what it looks and sounds like; and (c) **Motivation/engagement of followers**--

Understanding that clarity regarding roles, vision and collaboration creates motivated and engaged followers. In the next chapter, my grounded theory will be detailed. Chapter Five will expand on that grounded theory through discussion and interpretation of these themes, implications for practice, and suggestions for further research.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, grounded theory study is to determine indicators of a collaborative relationship between the superintendent and the curriculum director. This chapter will discuss the findings and themes of the study. These findings and themes answer the research question: What are the actions, beliefs, attitudes, qualities, social structures and processes of a collaborative relationship between the superintendent and curriculum director? Lastly, the chapter entails a discussion of the implications from the data, limitations of the study, suggestions for future research, and concluding thoughts.

Discussion of Findings

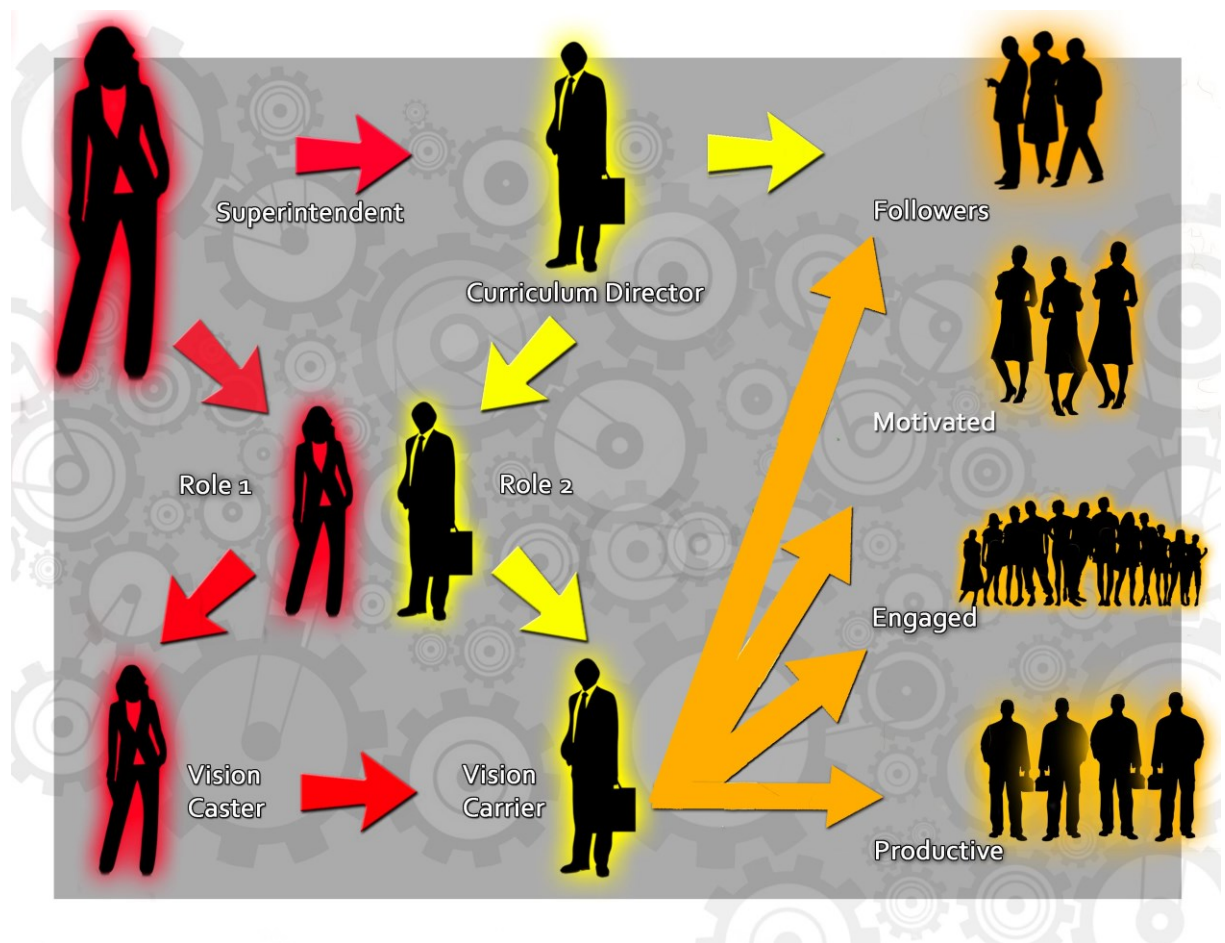
The themes that emerged as success indicators of a collaborative relationship between the superintendent and curriculum director are: (a) **Role identification as it relates to vision--** Clarity regarding how one functions in the organization, and how that function relates to the vision of the organization, including the responsibilities to manifest the vision; (b) **Collaboration--** having a coherent understanding of working together to achieve a common goal and what it looks and sounds like; and (c) **Motivation/Engagement of followers--** Understanding that clarity regarding roles, vision, and collaboration creates motivated and engaged followers. These themes evolved into the following grounded theory per Figure 2:

If superintendents and curriculum directors understand and identify with their respective roles as either vision caster or vision carrier, and they have a coherent understanding of the definition of collaboration, they will be able to collaborate

successfully. An outcome of this successful collaboration is followers that are motivated, engaged, and productive.

Figure 1.2

Vision Casters and Carriers



Grounded Theory Connections to Theoretical Constructs

Strategic Leadership and Transformational Leadership

Strategic and transformational leadership theory each describe leaders who have a clear vision, are collaborative, and motivate followers (Hickman, 2016; Northouse, 2016). The grounded theory insists that leaders understand their roles, as it relates to the vision.

Transformational leadership is based on vision--the leader defines an idealized picture of the

future based around organizational values. Additionally, according to transformational leadership theory, followers are enjoined to seek a better future for the organization and to commit to seeking the goals arising from the vision (Bush, 2018; Keskes et al., 2018). Superintendent C. Black stated that having staff who were “not aligned to the mission and vision” impeded progress. Leaders stated that they depended upon those closest to them--either the superintendent or the curriculum director-- to keep them faithful to the vision. Superintendent E. Green describes his curriculum director as his “right hand,” telling him when it’s time to slow down and helping him to “fill in the blanks.”

A strategic leader and her dominant coalition establish vision, mission, and values to focus activities (Cote, 2017; Hickman, 2016). A clear vision inspires motivation, commitment, and implementation of the mission and the vision (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000). Leaders need to be confident in their collaborative roles, related to the vision for the organization.

Having a coherent understanding of collaboration is vital. Collaboration, communication, and clear expectations alleviate worry and increase confidence in the organization. Said collaboration is manifested in the leadership team being involved in the planning and structure of the organization (Blum-DeStefano & Drago-Severson, 2018; Hickman, 2016). Per superintendent A. Red, in the Apple Blossom district, central office leaders and principals engage in extensive dialogue, collaborating about most decisions, until a decision can be reached. When planning leadership meetings, agendas are living documents, including all leaders’ voices. The leaders are able to give feedback and “tweak,” agendas, according to curriculum director B. Teaching.

Followers and leaders—beginning with the superintendent as leader and the curriculum director as follower—must work together to achieve success. According to transformational

leadership theory, followers and leaders are inextricably bound together in the transformation process (Northouse, 2016). Curriculum director B. Teaching ascribes to “speaking one’s personal truth” while collaborating with their teams. This practice supports the development of processes and systems that ensure everyone’s capacity to work together throughout the entire organization, and creates a bonding process between leaders and followers (Carter & Greer, 2013).

A crucial aspect of the grounded theory is the ability to develop motivated, engaged, and productive followers. Transformational leaders use inspirational communication—appeals and emotion to arouse followers’ motivation (Keske et al., 2018). Corroborating this thought, Curriculum director D. Learning spoke to her “understanding of emotional intelligence” or being aware of and responding to her followers’ emotions as supporting their motivation. Transformational leaders also choose behaviors that complement or supplement what is missing in the work setting (Northouse, 2016). Superintendent A. Red exhibits these behaviors with strategies such as debriefing after meetings to promote clarity. She also places an emphasis on turning problems into opportunities for growth and further understanding. A. Red teaches her team to “paraphrase twice and then ask a probing question” to ensure understanding of initiatives and directives.

Strategic and transformational leaders, with an understanding of their role within the organization, along with a clear vision, support successful collaboration and the development of followers that are not only motivated, but engaged.

Grounded Theory Connections to Themes

Role identification as it relates to vision

A role is a way of behaving associated with a defined position in a social system (Selznick, 1984). In the grounded theory, central to defining that position is the understanding of

how that position connects to the vision of the organization. Vision is referred to in these three steps to support change: create a vision, communicate the vision to all stakeholders, and empower others to support the vision. It is necessary that superintendents explicitly communicate how they see themselves and their curriculum director within the vision they have set for the district. The lack of understanding regarding one's role creates obstacles such as ineffective decision-making, poor communication, and conflicting values. Improving education, and sustaining that improvement requires that district-level leadership unite the community, internal and external stakeholders around a common vision. The superintendent must be transparent in articulating that they are the vision caster and that they expect the curriculum director to fulfill their role as vision carrier. (Bjork, 1993; Bridges et al., 2019; Kotter & Cohen, 2002).

Superintendents are the vision casters--responsible for seeing the big picture and creating the organizational structure. During the pre-interview, superintendent E. Green asserted that he is responsible for setting the tone, culture, and direction of the district through a clearly articulated vision and supporting goals (Clore, 1991; Danna & Spratt, 2013; Petersen, 1999). Superintendent participants also believed that they are responsible to the board of education, staff, community, and all stakeholders. Superintendent C. Black affirmed that the superintendent is first responsible to the board, carrying out their goals, objectives, and vision for the district, ensuring that the "direction that's been set by the board is followed through and goals are accomplished." Transformational leadership is also about developing the central construct of vision, with followers enjoined to seek a better future for the organization and committed to seeking the goals arising from the vision (Bush, 2018).

Superintendents see curriculum directors as the implementers, enactors, and carriers of the vision that they set. Per superintendent C. Black, the curriculum director is responsible for

enacting the vision established by the board and superintendent and carrying it through to completion. The success and longevity of the superintendent is contingent upon the support of the assistant superintendent in charge of curriculum (Conley and Cooper, 2010). Superintendent E. Green declares that he is the one to “cast the vision [while] my curriculum director carries that vision to fruition.” Thus, curriculum directors are the vision carriers.

The assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction is a leader who disseminates state standards and oversees implementation of research-based instructional strategies (Dimuzio, 2011). Most curriculum directors see their role as relating to teaching, learning, and compliance. Curriculum director B. Teaching defined his role as ensuring a guaranteed and viable curriculum. F. Leading simply stated that he determines what is taught, how, and with what tools.

One curriculum director, D. Learning, had a divergent thought. She articulated her role as being “the conduit of compliance and implementation” in that she manages and filters all of the district’s compliance and implementation issues. Central office administrators, such as curriculum directors, manage and direct district operations. Curriculum directors are also charged with implementing and monitoring implementation of the local policy, state regulations, and federal legislation, along with federal accountability measures and new curricular standards. The roles of central office leaders are multi-faceted, and include: learning system designer, program manager, coaching champion, facilitator, and change agent. These core roles overlap and interconnect (Gamble, 2013; Kaltenecker, 2011; Killion & Harrison, 2016). The literature supports curriculum director D. Learning’s assertion that her role is not solely related to curriculum, but compliance matters as well.

The districts where curriculum directors do not mention carrying the vision are also the districts where they admitted to not having a consistent meeting time—in early September, after the school year had begun. Curriculum director F. Leading stated that he and his superintendent “haven’t nailed down” a meeting time yet this year. Superintendent C. Black stated that he and his curriculum director were “working on weekly meetings to establish consistency.” There are often conflicting cultures in district administration. Leaders must understand that to assemble a good team, one may have to pull people in or push people out (Durand et al., 2016; Lytle, 1992). Adaptive challenges such as facing changing realities, priorities, attitudes, and behaviors demand a truly collaborative team.

Conflicting culture appeared evident in the Cherry Tree District. The unwillingness to connect between superintendent C. Black and curriculum director D. Learning may be a result of the dissonance between the curriculum director’s perception of her role and the superintendent’s perception of her role. Perhaps since the curriculum director sees her role as that of ensuring compliance, she does not see the need for consistent communication. The role of the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction is ignored and misunderstood, and curriculum directors mostly construct their own visions of their roles, shaped by the context of the organizational culture (Kaltenecker, 2011). Superintendent C. Black may have to examine this conflict in his administration and determine if there has been a change in realities, priorities, attitudes, or behaviors. According to the grounded theory, this lack of clarity, or dissonance, regarding one’s role and responsibility in manifesting the vision will impede the collaboration necessary for the superintendent to cast the vision and the curriculum director to carry it. Consistent communication supports collaboration, which is the vehicle for the vision to be cast and carried.

Collaboration

Curriculum director F. Leading defined collaboration as working together for a common goal with multiple stakeholders in order to achieve a successful outcome for an organization. In a similar manner, curriculum director B. Teaching stated, “Collaboration is a process in which two or more people mutually participate in collective dialogue, talk, thinking, reflecting, processing, and innovating ideas together to get to a space where collectively the team can agree upon a set of actions or commitments to adopt to solve a dilemma.” Some leadership theorists emphasize influence or exercised power over collaboration to achieve outcomes, while at the same time admitting that leadership theories are evolving to include more shared decision-making. Collaboration between central office administrators is necessary to improve student achievement, and one cannot lead change alone (Jiagang et al., 2020; Kotter & Cohen, 2002; Rothman, 2009). So, what does this necessary collaboration look like?

One indicator of collaboration is the practice of sharing ideas and supporting one another’s work. It is the ties between individuals in a system that create the structure needed to modify formal systems and create reform (Goddard et al., 2004). The leadership team at the Apple Blossom district embodies these ties by stating that their team often says the same thing, reads the same books, and shares values and beliefs. The Cherry Tree District believes collaboration should be authentic, with the merging of ideas. Qualities of this necessary collaboration include the willingness to listen and the ability to nurture; in the words of curriculum director F. Leading at the Dogwood district, he and his superintendent “...talk about everything!”

According to the grounded theory, there must be a coherent understanding of collaboration. Clarifying expectations, understandings, and ways of knowing are crucial to

developing that shared understanding. This shared understanding is strengthened by collaborative structures such as: collegial inquiry, mentoring, and teaming (Blum-DeStefano & Drago-Severson, 2017).

Although the above descriptions of collaboration are ideal, they do not live out to the same level of intensity in each district. This was evident when the leaders debriefed after the educational events. Goals for clarity when communicating objectives and expectations of open discussion amongst leaders were explicit in the Apple Blossom and Dogwood districts. According to superintendent A. Red in the Apple Blossom district, “outcomes are not a secret.” A common understanding must be achieved. Per curriculum director B. Teaching, the agenda is a “living document” with everyone having a voice. In the Dogwood district, superintendent E. Green asserted that the purpose of meetings was to communicate, clarify, and “ensure that there was no ambiguity.” Curriculum director F. Leading affirmed this as a time for everyone to share and “hash out any misunderstandings.” Examining assumptions and exploring pressing issues of practice are integral to a collaborative structure (Blum-DeStefano & Drago-Severson, 2017).

Conversely, when debriefing with the Cherry Tree district after the senior leadership meeting, there was no mention of such collaborative expectations. Superintendent C. Black mentioned “sharing information.” The curriculum director, D. Learning went so far as to say, “I can speak to my part” when asked to reflect on the meeting. Such a statement leads to the assumption that there was no co-planning or discussion of objectives beforehand, and that the curriculum director had no interest in doing so. For a member of the executive team to only feel responsible for “her part,” implies that the team needs to be developed and directed. There are certain leadership challenges that strategic leaders must overcome: developing employees, instigating inspiration, guiding innovation, and directing a team (Sarfraz, 2017). These might be

challenges that the Cherry Tree superintendent has yet to overcome, regarding his relationship with his curriculum director.

Because the curriculum director's role is often unclear, curriculum director D. Learning may not be aware of or recognize the key functions of the assistant superintendent's or curriculum director's role: (a) promoting collaboration, (b) coordinating initiatives, and (c) building and maintaining relationships (Kaltenecker, 2011). These functions were not evident in curriculum director D. Learning's response. This is another example of dissonance in role perception. A lack of understanding of one's role leads to overstepping and creates obstacles (Fusarelli et al., 2018). At the time of the interview, D. Learning had just completed her first year in the role. Perhaps her lack of understanding can be associated with her brief time in the position. Regardless of the impetus, this dissonance does not support the collaboration that leads to motivated and engaged followers.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the concepts of role identification, collaboration, and motivation/engagement of followers are interdependent. Each is necessary for the other to exist. Confirming this thought, Bell (2020) stated:

Strategic leadership theory and transformational leadership theory each describe leaders who are collaborative and who guide their followers to accomplish goals and exceed expectations. Developing these types of followers is one of the crucial skills indicative of a collaborative leader. (p. 20)

Ensuring that strategic and transformational superintendents and curriculum directors embrace their roles as vision casters and vision carriers as they collaborate, helps ensure that they support their followers in demonstrating motivation, engagement, and productivity.

Motivation/Engagement of followers

Superintendent A. Red asserted that leaders are supposed to “mobilize and motivate” followers to achieve stated goals and objectives. She also stated that good leaders have “high expectations and provide high levels of support.” Leaders try to enhance followers’ goal attainment by providing rewards, as an example of strategic leadership theory. Followers will also be motivated and engaged if they think they are capable of performing their work. This is collective efficacy--the belief construct regarding the capability of the entire system or organization to execute courses of action (Goddard et al., 2004; Indvik & Fitzpatrick, 1986).

Curriculum director D. Learning believes that followers are motivated and become more engaged when a leader supports and encourages them to be the best, or to excel in their assigned tasks. Transformational leaders motivate employees to enhance organizational performance. Leadership style has a significant impact on organizational culture and citizen behaviors, such as motivation and engagement, as well as job satisfaction (Bush, 2018; Carter & Greer, 2013).

Engagement is supported by followers knowing that the leaders are working together or collaborating. Superintendent E. Green stated that when his principals have questions about his curriculum director’s mandates, he explains, “It’s what I told him to do.” Central office staff must collaborate with each other in order to adequately support building leaders (Gamble, 2013).

Followers need to identify with organizational mission, vision, and values. This focus infuses energy, which manifests as engagement and escalates commitment to the organization. Transformational leaders also engage their followers by coaching and advising them. Curriculum director D. Learning leans into this strategy, believing it is her responsibility as a leader to remove barriers for her staff (Carter & Greer, 2013; Cote, 2017).

Leaders also mentioned characteristics that are impediments to motivating and engaging followers. According to superintendent C. Black, he has a habit of “living in his head” and not always verbalizing expectations. Curriculum director F. Leading freely admits to needing a little more patience and empathy. Leaders must articulate the vision in order for followers to be engaged in making that vision actionable. Exhibiting patience and empathy results in the positive development of followers, inclusive of their being empowered and high performing (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Boal & Hooijberg, 2000).

As illustrated in Figure 2, leaders must know and understand their roles and agree about the components of collaboration. This knowledge and understanding leads to exhibiting the behaviors that will motivate and engage their followers: clearly articulating the organizational vision, displaying empathy, coaching, and advising followers.

Implications for Practice

In alignment with the grounded theory, the superintendent must be confident in her role as vision caster. She must possess agency, believing that she is the “lead influencer” (Fusarelli et al., 2018, p. 1). The superintendent must also possess the power that manifests as exercised influence over followers that can be observed and measured (Jiagang et al., 2020). Possessing agency and the power of her influence will support the development of collective trust which will improve the collaboration of the entire organization (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). I agree with Northouse (2016) that, “Transformational leadership involves an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them” (p. 61). Curriculum director B. Teaching concurs: “Effective leadership is about influence and impact.” The Michigan Association of School Administrators provides leadership coaching and professional learning to support the development of these skills. The organization currently has a

New Superintendent Leadership Academy, as well as a Mentor Coaching program (gomasa.org).

Boards of education might want to consider these soft skills—agency and influence--when engaging in the process of superintendent selection. Working with Human Resources departments, boards of education can revise job postings to include agency and demonstrated evidence of influence as preferred characteristics for a superintendent. Districts can also compose interview questions and performance tasks to assist with discovering these qualities.

Likewise, when selecting a curriculum director, there needs to be a detailed conversation regarding the superintendent's vision, and how the curriculum director sees herself fitting into, as well as, supporting that vision. A curriculum director who closely identified with his role as vision carrier was B. Teaching. He stated, "I help her to be successful. If she's successful, our children are successful." The superintendent should ascertain the curriculum director's ability to follow as well as lead. One cannot carry the leader's vision if they are constantly trying to promote their own. Communicating the vision and promoting collaboration as duties of the curriculum director. This leader should have a deep knowledge of curriculum and a deeper knowledge of how to lead in a way that makes followers want to follow, thereby meeting their motivational needs (Kaltenecker, 2011; Northouse, 2016).

Additionally, it is necessary that superintendents and curriculum directors have a coherent understanding of the definition of collaboration and the indicators thereof. Each must agree that all voices should be heard, according to superintendent A. Red and they should regard one another as thought partners, as affirmed by superintendent E. Green. At the Apple Blossom District if the leaders had not had an informal meeting by mid-morning, it was an issue; Curriculum director, B. Teaching stated, "We collaborate with such intensity, if we don't speak by 9:15-9:45 a.m., I know there's a problem."

All voices being heard does not simply apply to the leadership team. Superintendents and curriculum directors must be intentional in communicating the vision to all community stakeholders. And not only communicating, participating in open dialogue and adjusting the vision where necessary. Organizational improvement happens by facilitating collaborative leadership (Sheppard, 2009). This collaboration will manifest in motivated, engaged, and productive followers.

The superintendent and the curriculum director should also be collaborating regarding how to develop the most productive team. In a healthy organization, followers must be willing to be vulnerable, based on leaders being benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open. Superintendent E. Green concurred, positing that integrity and commitment are necessary qualities in a leader. District administrators should place a high value on collaboration, communication, and strategic leadership (Holtzman, 2012; Muller, 2015).

In keeping with strategic leadership theory, superintendent A. Red identified her curriculum director, finance director, and human resources director as her dream team, describing how they are masterminds at problem solving. As the superintendent and curriculum director supervise principals, they should be modeling for principals how to develop these productive teams at the building level. There must be collective leadership between buildings and central office to help create conditions that support learning (Gamble, 2013; Hickman, 2016).

This collective leadership and support will empower principals to create strategic change in their buildings (Hickman, 2016). Such strategic change can be created by principals firstly, ensuring that they have communicated the vision for the building clearly—to staff, parents and the community. Next, following the superintendent's lead, identifying 2–3 key teacher leaders as

well as community members to assist with carrying that vision. It is imperative that there be constant and consistent communication with all stakeholders. Parents and other community members should be ongoing participants in the conversation, not just as a matter of compliance. The vision should be a living document, much like the district vision, tweaked according to the needs of the school, based upon feedback from these stakeholders. Demonstrating collaboration with and adhering to the council of this team will develop staff members who are motivated, engaged, and productive.

Regarding implications for the field of education as a whole. Teacher preparation is integral to the development of effective educators. These programs, in the past have been negligent as it relates to identifying and developing leaders in the field, even at that early stage. Likewise, in many districts, emphasis on and investment in building leadership capacity has not been as intentional as it might be. Still, after years of research, administrative positions are seen as more managing operations than instructional leadership (Whritner, 2009).

In order to create a cohort of educational leaders prepared to be vision casters and vision carriers, that preparation starts at the beginning. Instructors in teacher preparation programs should attend to these leadership capabilities in their students. Pre-service teachers should be given opportunities to lead their colleagues in learning communities, as they hone their skills in pedagogy and administration. These leadership experiences could enhance resumes, identifying recent graduates who have availed themselves of these opportunities to develop their leadership capacity. School districts could then strategically place these brand new teachers and eminent leaders with veteran teacher leaders and principals to mentor them as they continue to evolve.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should explore more contexts. For example, a longitudinal study following several more districts should be studied for a minimum of three to five years, to increase the breadth and depth of data collected. Also, expanding the sample and the lifting of COVID restrictions, would allow for the opportunity to study larger (or smaller) districts, in broader geographical areas. Assertions could be made regarding the effect of the population size and demographics of a district, as well as the demographics of the participants. For example, how would results be different in the Upper Peninsula or Lower Peninsula? Would participant responses be different in larger or smaller districts? What about if the student population was not situated in poverty? Does the race or gender of the superintendent or of the curriculum director matter? Would the grounded theory be confirmed or disputed by studying more districts of varying populations with different demographics among students and participants? Additionally, while conducting the study it was determined that each team had not worked together more than two years. It could be argued that this is not enough time to solidify relational and collaborative structures. Might this data look different in another year or two? How long does it take to develop relational and collaborative structures?

Lastly, adding quantitative data to this study could prove beneficial. As these qualitative indicators are examined, what might the metrics be that accompany them? Would there be an increase in student scores on local or state high stakes assessments as a result of this effective collaboration? How might other metrics be impacted, such as attendance or the number of behavioral incidents? The combination of quantitative and qualitative data could provide deeper insight to the theory.

Personal Implications for Research

A critical narrative of my personal experiences as a curriculum supervisor and my relationship with the assistant superintendent, as well as the superintendent would also add to the literature. In many ways these relationships, or lack of same, were the impetus for this study. I believed that there had to be a more collaborative way to lead, and became interested in discovering how these relationships were lived out in other districts. How might my experiences look through the lenses of strategic and transformational leadership?

Because of these lived experiences during my 30 years as an educator, I plan to conduct an auto ethnography exploring African-American females in leadership roles—teacher leaders, building leaders, and central office administrators, including superintendents. I have been that teacher leader, who did not know that she was being groomed—attending district meetings, providing training and support to parents and colleagues. I have experienced mentoring and support as well as being disregarded and disrespected by my leaders—as a substitute, classroom teacher and as a central office administrator. This research will help to make more explicit the preparation, motivation, and best (or worst) practices of these leaders and add to the literature that supports developing leaders in the field. How might clarity regarding one’s role as it relates to vision, a coherent understanding of collaboration and the skill to develop motivated, engaged and productive followers have resulted in different experiences for me, and support different experiences for educators, particularly African-American female educators, to come?

Conclusion

This study purposed to answer the research question: What are the actions, beliefs, attitudes, qualities, social structures, and processes of a collaborative relationship between the superintendent and curriculum director? As I made connections between the data and the literature, a grounded theory emerged. This study has identified superintendents as “vision

casters” and curriculum directors as “vision carriers.” Merriam-Webster defines cast as sending, putting, or bringing forth. Vision is defined as the power of seeing, conceiving, and discernment (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Whatever future that the superintendent has imagined for the district, it is her charge to send it forth through her curriculum director and the rest of the leadership team. Per the definition of carry, it is the curriculum director's job, with reference to the vision, to move while supporting, convey by direct communication, direct the course of, and influence by emotional appeal (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In order for the superintendent and curriculum director to collaborate and to manifest the vision, each leader needs to identify with and embrace their roles as vision caster or vision carrier.

Figure 2 illustrates the grounded theory that emerged as a result of this study. Pictured in the figure is the superintendent in the role of vision caster and the curriculum director in the role of vision carrier. Each is depicted as having a direct connection and effect on followers. The merging of the two roles (collaboration) is symbolized by the combining of colors—red and yellow—creating orange, which is the color of the followers. According to the theory, understanding roles and collaboration creates motivated, engaged, and productive followers.

The superintendent and curriculum director are, in my opinion, the two most important leadership positions within a school district. Supported by this research study and the literature, the superintendent must have the vision for instruction, and the curriculum director must be charged with carrying out that vision (Clore, 1991; Petersen, 1999; Whritner, 2009). Cohesion and collaboration are necessary to truly manifest the vision. Each decision, ideally shared, the superintendent and curriculum director make affects the lives of many others. Children’s futures are literally resting in their hands. As the study participants have stated, together they are responsible for the oversight of the district and accountable to the board, staff, and community.

They are responsible for the teaching and learning--curriculum, instruction and assessment-- of students in grades Pre-K through 12. District oversight cannot be accomplished without successful collaboration between these key leaders. Success is defined as having attained a desired end (Merriam, n.d.) and this desired end can only be achieved with clearly identified and communicated vision, efficacious collaboration, and motivated, engaged, and productive followers.

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Appendix A: Pre-Survey

1. What is collaboration?
2. Explain effective leadership.
3. What are the characteristics that make you an effective leader?
4. What are your strengths as an effective leader?
5. What are your weaknesses as an effective leader?
6. What are the strengths in others' leadership that makes your job more rewarding?
7. What are weaknesses in others' leadership that make your job more challenging?

Appendix B: Open-Ended Pre-Interview and Protocol

Before I ask the following questions, I will state, “This interview has 7 questions and will last 30 to 45 minutes. Remember, you may skip any question and quit at any time.”

1. When you think of you and your superintendent/curriculum director, what words would you use to describe your interactions? Why?
2. How would you describe the curriculum director/superintendent’s role; your role?
3. How is decision-making determined? What specific decisions can be made independently and which require prior approval? Please provide examples whenever possible.
4. What are you (superintendent and curriculum director) collaborating on right now? Explain.
5. Tell me about your last meeting. (Possible prompts: How long was it? What was left unsettled? How frequently do you meet? How do you decide how your time is spent?) Would you mind sharing an agenda?
6. How many years have you been a superintendent/curriculum director? What made you choose to follow this path?
7. How long have you worked with the current superintendent/curriculum director?

Appendix C: Post Educational Event Open-Ended Interview and Protocol

Before I ask the following questions, I will state, “This interview has 3 questions and will last 15 to 30 minutes. Remember, you may skip any question and quit at any time.”

1. What were the expected outcomes of this meeting/event?
2. Do you feel that they were achieved? What are your success indicators that these outcomes were achieved? What barriers prevented these outcomes being achieved?
3. What action steps were assigned to you as a result of the meeting/event? Which action steps were assigned to your superintendent/curriculum director?